

# MILITARY HISTORY OF Corporal Harold “Pappy” Wagner... USMC

An Iwo Jima Survivor

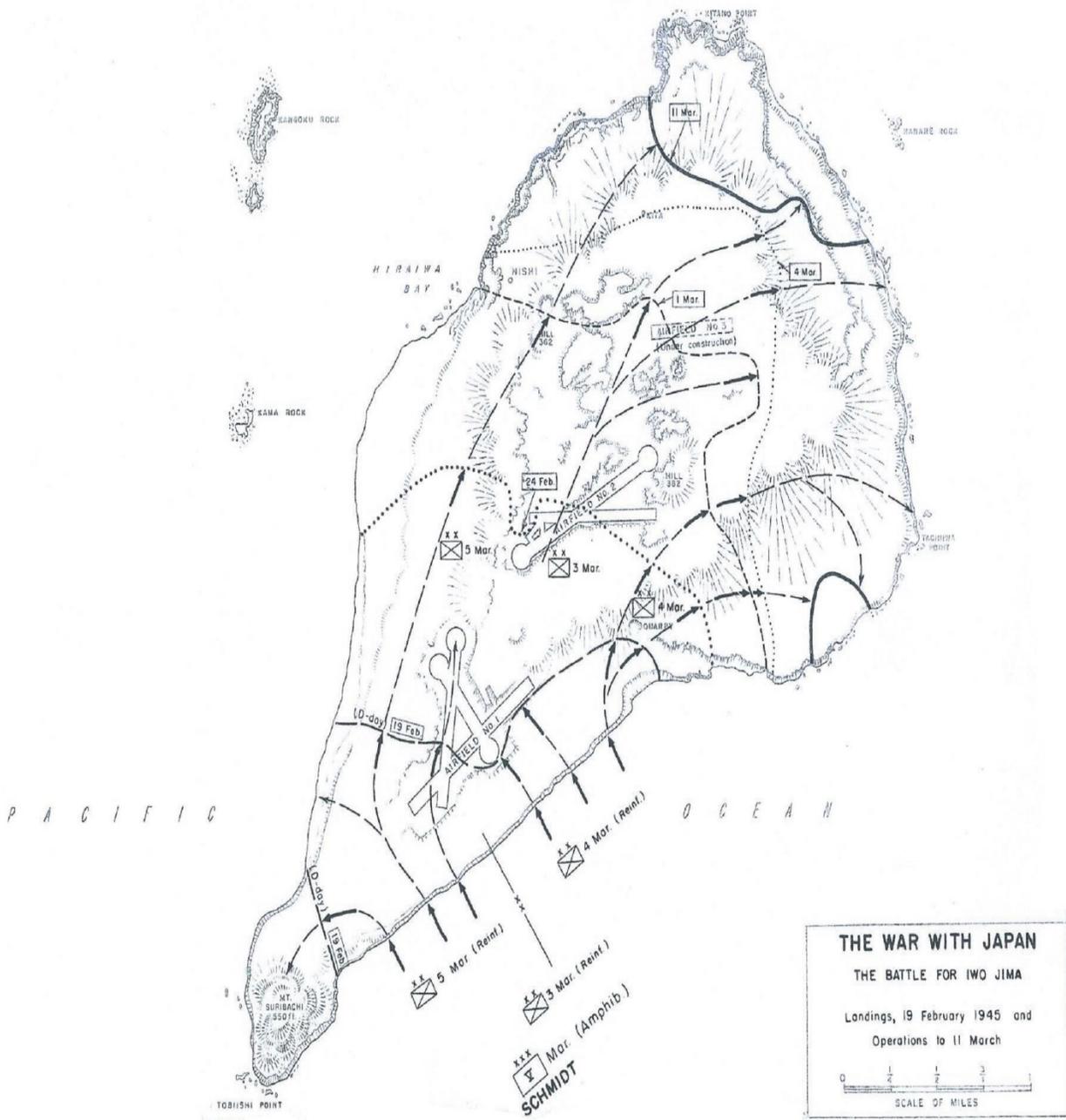


“Uncommon valor was a common virtue”...Admiral Chester Nimitz

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# Table of Contents

PREFACE.....	3
Basis of Data/Information: .....	3
PERSONAL HISTORY of HAROLD “PAPPY” WAGNER USMC .....	4
Birth to Boot .....	4
Making of a Marine....”Boot Camp”.....	5
Advanced Training: .....	8
Guam: .....	10
Some of Your Dad’s Memories from Guam:.....	11
Iwo Jima ....Personal Experiences .....	12
Post Iwo Jima .....	23
BATTLE of IWO JIMA.....	26
Background.....	26
Japanese Perspective.....	27
General Kuribayashi Strategy for Defending the Island:.....	29
American Order of Battle and Perspective .....	33
MG Schmidt’s Corps Commander, 5 <sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps (VAC) Strategy for the Attack:.....	35
D-Day... February 20 <sup>th</sup> ... H- Hour...0900 .....	38
Initial Assault .....	39
Flag Raisings.....	43
Island Secured....Battle Rages .....	47
Battle in Retrospect .....	52
Rank and Awards: .....	55
WORLD WAR II in PERSPECTIVE:.....	55
CONCLUSION: .....	57
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	58



## **Military History of Harold Wagner... USMC**

### **PREFACE**

#### **Basis of Data/Information:**

I interviewed your dad several times as well as conducting an “on-line research” and reading parts of seven books concerning his Marine Corps unit and their participation in the most bloody “Pacific Theatre “ campaign, Iwo Jima. His participation in the “Great War” was significant! He was a well-trained, motivated Marine assigned to an artillery unit supporting the campaign’s three infantry divisions. It should be noted that many of his fellow Marines were killed or severely wounded during his combat experiences on Iwo Jima. It should also be recognized combat in the Pacific was against a fanatical enemy, one who would not surrender, nor take prisoners, thus resulting in scenes of horrific death. During the Marine Corps and Army experiences during the Pacific Island campaigns, it is documented that if the enemy did not kill or wound you, diseases, such as, malaria, dysentery, dengue fever, fungus, parasitic infections and other tropical medical maladies would disable you. For every Marine killed or wounded in combat in the Pacific, eight became non-combat casualties due to disease.

The human toll was enormous on Iwo Jima, as one third of all Marine combat casualties in WWII occurred during this battle. For the U.S., 6,821 sons, husbands, brothers and fathers died on the island, while another 21,865 were wounded in the endeavor to secure the 7.5 square-mile island. It was the only time in WWII that U.S. casualties exceeded that of the Japanese, and more died during this conflict than died on the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Not since Gettysburg had more men died during a single battle.

For the Japanese, all but 1,000 of the estimated 21,000 defenders died on Iwo Jima. Most of the captured were slave Korean laborers. The enemy's insistence on death over capture led to a profound number of "battle fatigue" cases. More than 2,500 Marines suffered from combat fatigue (today called PTSD) during the battle, including severe mental illnesses that they carried the rest of their lives.

During the 36 days of battle on Iwo Jima, an unprecedented 27 men were distinguished by earning the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest honor for valor. Of those 27 recipients, just 14 survived the battle; 13 were honored posthumously.

This short paper is a history of Corporal Harold's 35 days on the "volcanic sulfur island". Additionally background materials are presented on his life, Marine training and WWII experiences. Lastly, some historical background information is provided on the Iwo Jima battle and WWII in general.

## **PERSONAL HISTORY of HAROLD "PAPPY" WAGNER USMC**

### **Birth to Boot**

- Your dad was born on his parents' farm on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1925 in Adams County Ohio. (southern Ohio). The second son of a family of six children.
- The "depression years" were very difficult times for all Americans and your dad's family was no exception. His Father managed the family's 110 acre farm whose cash crops were tobacco, corn, soybeans and vegetables. His four sisters primarily took care of a huge vegetable garden, while your dad, uncle and your grandfather took care of crops and the large farm animals.
- Your dad describes life on the farm as "surviving vs. living". Financial distress was the norm among all Americans and Europeans. The farm house had no electricity, water came from a hand pump behind the house and an "outhouse" was used for sanitation. Canvas bed mattresses were filled with field straw and without sheets. Bathing was done in a nearby

creek, the same body of water that was used for laundry.

- However, food was somewhat plentiful and always healthy due to long days of hard work in the fields. Most meals consisted of vegetables, milk from a family cow, chicken and eggs. A small number of cattle and hogs were also raised. A family smoke house was used to cure the meat for the coming year. Work on the farm consisted of very long work days with no time off for fun and play. Your dad missed childhood “fun times”.
- Farm work/chores/tasks were the primary responsibility of your grandfather, your dad’s older brother and your Father. His four sisters tended to the large garden, chickens, hogs, canning, preserving meats and cleaning the small house. Once a month, your dad’s Mother would take the one-horse surrey to town for a few household necessities that were not produced on the farm.
- Some of your dad’s neighbors were not so fortunate. As a result, his family chose to be a good, generous and benevolent neighbors and friends by donating in the fall of the year, parts of a swine, cattle and vegetables to their less fortunate neighbors. An act of generosity was known only to God.
- Due to the heavy farm work schedule, like many other American young men, your dad quit school after the eighth grade to support the family farm.

### **Making of a Marine....”Boot Camp”:**

- On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, “a day which will live in infamy,” Pearl Harbor was attacked by several hundred Japanese aircraft in two waves. That surprise attack killed more than three thousand American Navy, Marine and Army personnel. In relative terms, the casualty number was slightly fewer than the 9/11 Islamic terrorists attacks on New York and Washington D.C.

- Your dad's family learned of the attack on the family battery-operated radio located in their living room. The radio was purchased in 1937 and it required new batteries on a monthly basis. Saturday evenings would find the family listening to various news and mystery shows. At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, your dad was sixteen years old and not old enough to volunteer for military service. Over the next two years, the family received war updates on the various fronts of the war, including the Pacific war, especially Naval battles at the Coral Sea and Midway. The Marine garrison's heroic fight on Wake Island, as well as the first offensive campaign of the war, Guadalcanal, are radio memories.
  
- Your dad volunteered (not drafted) to join the Marine Corps and reported to Paris Island, South Carolina for his twelve week "boot camp" on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1944. Boot camp changed him as a young man. As it does every person who finishes and has earned the honor of be called "Marine". The boot camp experience was designed to humble and humiliate each boot. At graduation, the survivors of "boot camp" were confident and cocky, feeling they had joined the finest fighting force in the world. When asked why your dad joined the Corps, he stated he was seeking the best combat training available, after two buddies of his who were in the Army, were killed in southern Europe. Little did he know he would be instilled with foundational motto of "Esprit de corps," which all Marines have after initial training experiences. To this day, your dad embodies that spirit and tradition as a proud member of the Naples Marine Corps League (MCL).
  
- He was eighteen years old at the time he took the "oath" to defend the country "against all enemies, foreign and domestic." This is the same oath taken today by our country's leaders as well as all military personnel. It should be noted that the country was no longer suffering through the great depression. In reality the financial Depression did not end until sixteen million men entered the military during the Second World War (WWII).

- Some memorable moments/highlights from your dad's twelve week "boot camp" at Paris Island, South Carolina were:
- A deep appreciation was instilled for ... "Esprit De Corps".
  - Constant repetition of falling out and in of the barracks, classrooms, mess halls....No matter how quickly they moved, it was never fast enough to meet the "Drill Instructors(D.I.s)" non-published speed.
  - Normal work days were from 0500 to 2200 hours.
  - His platoon of 75-80 "boots" lived in "Quonset hut" type barracks.
  - Experiencing his first visit to a dentist in his life.
  - Range week... long marches daily to and from the rifle range where his platoon qualified on the M-1 Garand rifle. Total exhaustion at the end of the day; regardless, their rifles were required to be cleaned and inspected by the D.I.s before "lights out".
  - Your dad qualified as a "sharpshooter" on the range with his M-1 rifle.
  - Long sessions of calisthenics on a daily basis to build strength and stamina.
  - Long force marches with full packs, rifle, ammo and gear up hills, through swamps and on dusty back roads.
  - Learning to work in a "team", always trusting the Marine to his right and left. This concept served him well on Iwo less than a year later.
  - Close order drill on the "grinder."
  - Building self confidence in the "individual" Marine.
  - Learning to trust and depend on the Marine on each side during combat (strict buddy system for survival).
  - Trusting his leaders; both NCOs and officers.
  - Gaining insightful knowledge of all weapons and equipment assigned to the infantry... including bayonet and grenade training (both would serve him well on Iwo).

- Operating in a “high level stressful” environment... sleep deprivation.
- Learning survival skills for extreme tropical environments.
- Learning night operations...patrolling, establishing defensive positions, conducting ambushes, reacting to ambushes, etc.
- Understanding the difference between cover and concealment and the basic elements of camouflage.
- No liberty during boot camp....once a week they would march to Base PX for “essentials” ... *i.e.*, pogy bait.

### **Advanced Training:**

- Following “Boot Camp” your dad was shipped by bus to Camp LeJuene, North Carolina for the twelve week “Communications Wireman” school. Training focused on pole climbing, stringing and repairing telephone comm wire (very valuable skill on Iwo), mastering the “military alphabet”, system of codes/ passwords, basic radio procedures and orientation to map reading and compass.
- Following his “communications pole training” he earned a ten day liberty pass to Ohio hitchhiking in uniform to his home. His homecoming was memorable with special meals and treatment. During the war years, GI’s had no problem getting rides as they were required to wear uniforms at all times off base! After his “liberty leave”, he received orders for Camp Pendleton, California. Once in southern California, your dad was reassigned to a newly updated Marine field of training unit, JASCO, “Joint Assault Signal Company”. Their primary mission was to coordinate naval gunfire in support of Marine infantry units, as well as coordinating close air support. Your dad traveled by train across the southern U.S. to Camp Pendleton, California.
- His unit of 80 recently graduated communications telephone technicians were led by a Corporal, and were assigned to the “boat basin” area of Camp Pendleton, called the Del Mar area of the base. Today, this area of the base on the southern border of the Camp supports several sea/beach-oriented

units; *i.e.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Assault Amphibian (Amtrac) Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Shore Party Battalion, and the First MEF Headquarters Command unit, as well as several logistical units and schools.

- The JASCO training initially was classroom training at the “boat basin” area and focused on; map reading, radio procedures, coordinating ships fires; close air support procedures and compass training. All would prove critical to the JASCO teams’ success during the various Marine amphibious campaigns in WWII.
  
- During the war years, living at Camp Pendleton was quite sparse in that units were assigned to huge “tent cities”. There were minimal luxuries. Food was plentiful and of good quality. Part of the training took place on what is today the San Clemente state park. Naval cruisers and battleships would be stationed off the island for daily and nightly “gunnery practice”. The JASCO teams served as “forward observers” (FOs), coordinators and liaison for the big cruiser guns, as well as for Naval and Marine aircraft close fire support. One of the ships your dad coordinated naval gun fire was from the old battleship *USS Arkansas*.  
[
- After several weeks of training, the JASCO teams boarded the aircraft carrier *USS Long Island* for the one month trip to Hawaii. During the circuitous route to Hawaii to avoid enemy submarines, many of the Marines slept on the flight deck under the wings of Marine Corsairs enroute to WestPac. As they departed San Diego, your dad related that there was not a dry eye among the Marine contingent as the California mountains disappeared over the horizon. By this time in the war, they all had heard of the previous Marine bloody campaigns on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Bougainville, Saipan, etc. In their minds they had a good idea of what awaited them in the coming months.
  
- Once on Hawaii, they were assigned to another huge “tent city” for two more weeks of naval gunfire coordination training, map reading, compass,

and radio communications on the infamous “Hickam Field”, one of five airfields attacked by the Japanese on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1941.

- Once this advanced training was completed, your dad caught a flight to the recently liberated island of Guam. During the long flight, the aircraft stopped for refueling on Johnson and Kwajalein islands.

### **Guam:**

- The island had recently, along with Saipan and Tinian, been liberated from the Japanese by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions.
- The Third Marine Division now stationed on Guam was in a high state of training for an impending invasion of... location unknown and extremely classified by the intelligence personnel. The principle of “need to know” was strictly adhered to by senior officers, Navy and Marine. Of course, there was rampant “scuttlebutt” and rumors as to the next invasion location and timetable for embarkation.
- In addition to the difficult fight on Guam, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division also had liberated the Island of Bougainville in the Solomon Island chain north of Guadalcanal. Both island campaigns were characterized by jungle-covered terrain, insect-borne diseases and a fanatical enemy. The Division had recently sustained 677 killed in action, 3,200 wounded and 9 missing while liberating Guam. The Marines inflicted 9,811 dead and 469 captured enemy. The enemy conducted a number of banzai charges/attacks on well defended Marine positions. All were successfully defended, with heavy enemy casualties. The campaign had produced a significant number of battle ready Marines for the next engagement.
- When your dad landed at the airport in Guam, allegedly, the island was secure! The infantry battalions were training in the jungles and on the beaches (practicing amphibious landings). However, they had recently

sustained casualties from enemy snipers and several Marine infantry companies were assigned to enemy clearing operations in the jungle covered hills. This threat restricted your dad and his teams to secure training areas as the infantry continued to patrol, locate and neutralize the enemy threat. Anecdotally, the last Japanese survivor emerged from the jungles in 1963 and surrendered to civil authorities.

- While on the Island, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had significantly modified their training focus from jungle warfare tactics to attacking fortified positions, locating and clearing mines, attacking fortified machine gun emplacements, use of armor and coordinating artillery fires; all would prove invaluable during the Iwo Jima campaign. Training was intense and physically demanding in preparation for their next amphibious landing challenge. Numerous “ship-to-shore” exercises were conducted using Amtrac (LVTs) vehicles, as well as Higgins (LCVP) boats equipped with rope ladders for climbing off the ship.

### **Some of Your Dad's Memories from Guam:**

- Witnessing local natives fishing in their small skiffs with nets.
- Playing and losing at poker....not a good gambler.
- Map, compass and radio/communications training continued at an intense pace seven days a week to ensure his skills as a naval gun coordinator were exceptional.
- One night near their encampment, a sentry shot and killed a Marine lieutenant. Apparently, the lieutenant had forgotten that day's password and would not cooperate with the young Marine when asked for the “challenge and password”. Result, one dead lieutenant. Word spread quickly concerning the incident and the importance of knowing and using the daily password process.
- Marines were prohibited from socializing with local natives and were restricted to their tent cities until boarding ships.
- Very nice temperate climate.....tent flaps rolled up and few insects.

- His first experience with Navajo “Code Talkers.” All Code Talkers were called “Chief”. All were dedicated, quiet and conscientious.
- No one had any knowledge of where the Division’s next campaign would be...highly classified and compartmentalized. Speculation and rumors reigned supreme with daily “scuttle butt” running rampant among the Marine units. However, when on ship to Iwo, the Marines heard Tokyo Rose inform the Marines where they would die and be buried.
- Amphibious, ship to shore rehearsals were a daily training focus for many units. Using the rope ladders to board “Higgins boats” often proved to be a significant challenge due to the weight of the “gear” carried by each Marine. The rope ladders were attached to the top deck railings of the troop ship. The Marines went “over the side”, down to the waiting Higgins boat, which rose and fell with the ocean swells, making debarkation dangerous.

### **Iwo Jima ....Personal Experiences**

- Your dad spent thirty five (35) long, dangerous days on “Sulfur Island”. He witnessed savagery and brutality on a daily basis that are unspeakable. The treeless island, smelled of sulfur (rotten eggs), was damp, misty, wind-swept and cold at night. The black volcanic sand was difficult to live in, for less than a foot under its surface; it became too hot to lie in for cover from enemy weapons. He came close to death several times during his “tour in hell” due to sniper fire and mortar attacks on their forward observer positions. Every step was filled with uncertainty of being his last step due to the thousands of land mines planted in ditches, on trails and on natural terrain “avenues of approach”!
- The JASCO Marines (3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company), including your dad’s five man team, were attached to the Division’s 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. The Division’s ship convoy departed Guam on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1945 as part

of the Divisions Artillery Regiment with stable weather conditions. During the voyage to Iwo Jima, the convoy encountered a typhoon and its accompanying high winds and waves. Waves were estimated to be 20-25 feet between swells.

- Most Marines on the convoy were extremely sea sick resulting in the decks and stairwells ladders to be covered and slippery with vomit. In the “holds” of the ships, far below the main deck, Marines slept in bunks stacked five or six high. Hatches were secured to preclude sea water from swamping the convoy. The living quarters of marines, the “holds of the ship”, were almost unbearable due to the smell of vomit, urine and various body odors.
  
- On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, your dad’s ship arrived on station several miles off shore of Iwo Jima. Morale among the Marines was very high, however, there was a feeling of trepidation among everyone that this campaign was not going to be a quick one. While sailing to Iwo, the Marines were issued maps of the islands, studied wall maps, aerial photos and reviewed plaster of paris mock-ups of the island. Intelligence briefings were given on what was expected for defensive tactics by the fanatical enemy. Intelligence briefings focused on “fortified/strong point defenses” developed by the Japanese, consisting of bunker, pill boxes and machine gun emplacements. Intelligence totally underestimated the number and extent of tunnels and artillery/heavy mortars, mine fields and snipers facing the assaulting Marines. Some Marine Generals predicted an eight to ten day campaign.
  
- While waiting to embark on a Higgins boat, your dad witnessed three days of naval pre-invasion bombardment from eight battleships and several cruisers. The Marine Generals leading the campaign had requested nine days of bombing and naval shelling, but Naval Admirals said three days would be sufficient. Also, he witnessed two days of B-24 bombing and close air, both Marine and Navy fighter/bomber support. All intended to neutralize pre-identified enemy defensive positions from photo reconnaissance air support. During the battle, it was confirmed, this

preparatory naval gunfire and air support were not nearly enough to neutralize even 20% of the enemy positions.

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines Division commanded by Major General Graves B. Erskine had a “reserve mission” initially in the battle (see below for US forces strategy and tactics, as well as Japanese defense plans). Once the Division was committed, in short summary, the division’s role was to head north in the center of the island while the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions covered its’ flanks west and east respectively. In essence, the “**tip of the spear**”.
- Your dad’s JASCO team consisting of one lieutenant and four enlisted Marines landed on D-Day + 1, the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1945. Their mission was to “get off the beach” and move toward Motoyama Airfield #1 to provide naval gunfire support to the Marines of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, moving to secure the neck of the island, Mount Suribachi and the eastern side of the island. Surviving was to be a challenge on or near the beaches the first three to five days of the assault. Your dad’s team was no exception to the continuous dangers of their assigned area.
- His five man JASCO Team members were the Lieutenant (name unknown), Privates Heaney (St Paul Minnesota), Bob Strom, your dad and your dad’s buddy, later killed in Cushman’s Pocket by mortar fire, Elmer Mueller.
- As the team prepared to disembark and climb down the rope ladders to their Higgins boat, they were each issued a new M-1 Garand Rifle, several magazines of ammo, three days of K rations, two canteens of fresh water and a pocket-size bible.
- The remainder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was forced to wait three days for the seas to calm before trying to board their Higgins boats for transport to the beaches. Many infantry and support division Marines were injured trying to board the boats using rope ladders in the high seas condition. As a result, a command decision was made to wait a couple of days before landing the division’s infantry regiments.

- On the two mile stretch of beaches, the initial assault Divisions (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) and four of their Regiments were faced with chaos due to enemy accurate artillery and mortar fire, along with numerous mine fields. Mines were strategically placed on all “avenues of approach” leading from the beaches. Nothing followed the detailed assault plans due to incredible fierce enemy resistance once the first three waves had landed practically unopposed. The enemy’s plan was to permit the first five assault waves to land unopposed. Once this large number of Marines were on the beach or inland fifty to one hundred yards, the Japanese began shelling the beaches, incoming boats and the Marines located inland adjacent to the three beach terraces. It was later learned, that every square yard of the island had been surveyed for highly accurate “pre-planned” fires from artillery and mortars. The enemy’s goal for the beach areas; create chaos and inflict as many casualties as possible. They more than met this objective.
- In addition to the preplanned and very accurate artillery, the Marines were faced with constant sniper fire, land mines, incredibly well camouflaged machine gun fortified positions, pill boxes and bunkers. All of these “fortified defense emplacements” were connected by a vast underground tunnel network stretching 13 -14 miles.
- Enemy snipers were trained to target Navy Corpsman, doctors and Marine leaders; *i.e.*, officers and NCOs’. The result, many Marine units were without experienced leaders within hours of the initial landings and wounded Marines did not get immediate lifesaving medical aid.
- What your dad witnessed and recalled from his beach survival ordeal:
  - Your dad waded ashore with his JASCO team in waist-deep waters after a couple mile journey in a Higgins Boat (LCVP). His memories are very vivid of “Screaming Mimi” rockets and artillery going over his head headed toward the next wave of Higgins boats, and

DUKWs carrying Marines, artillery and supplies to the crowded beaches.

- Your dad's JASCO team found the entire beach in total chaos. Death and destruction everywhere; *i.e.*, vehicles of all types, troop carriers, Higgins boats and Army crewed DUKWs burning. Many vehicles were loaded with dead and severely wounded Marines who never had an opportunity to disembark from their vehicles/craft before artillery and mortars scored direct hits.
- On the beach, he vividly recalls sights and smells of destroyed vehicles and boats, burning fuels, gun (cordite) powder and burnt flesh. Large impact craters caused by enemy artillery and large 320MM, spigot mortars.
- He witnessed chaos among units reigned with seemingly no one in charge as Marines tried to seek cover by moving a few yards to the minimal protection of the three low lying terraces facing the beaches. There appeared to be little unit continuity or chain of command. Unselfish bravery by individual Marines prevailed during the first 24-36 hours of the battle.
- Tracked vehicles, both amphibious troop carrying tractors, *i.e.*, Amtracs (LVTs), small cargo trucks, half-tracks and armor (Sherman tanks) were bogged down in the black volcanic sand of the beaches, making anything that moved an easy target for the enemy gunners on Mount Suribachi.
- Replacement equipment, ammunition, medical supplies, food and water, all needed for the push inland to sustain offensive momentum, were lying in the sand without guidance of where to move these critical logistical supplies. Logistical support continuity

broke down due to heavy casualties inflicted on the assault waves' unit leaders by the enemy artillery.

- Your dad, after he reached the beach on D+1, witnessed wounded and dead Marines everywhere. Many so badly destroyed by incoming artillery and heavy siege mortars, they could not be identified due missing body parts. Carnage and death were omnipresent.
- He witnessed Navy Corpsman and Navy doctors not permitted to provide medical support to many of the wounded Marines due to accurate and unending sniper fires. Many Navy medical personnel were singled out as priority targets by the enemy snipers likewise. Casualties among the Navy corpsman embedded with the assault waves were very high; exceeding 50%. During the first two days of the battle, the fire was so intense on the beach areas; navy field hospitals could not be established on the island. Approximately 1,200 wounded Marine casualties had to be evacuated directly to off-shore hospital ships on the first day of the battle.
- The JASCO Team's time on the beach was horrendous due to continuous sniper fire at anyone who moved, mortar fire, wet/damp conditions and nightly infiltration/probing of the Marine defensive perimeters by individual suicidal Japanese soldiers.
- Your dad's JASCO team spent three days on or near the beach. Their shelter/cover was limited to shell impact craters. Finally, after three days of mortar barrages and sniper fire, they moved inland to their assigned position adjacent to Airfield #1 to begin calling for Naval gunfire from their assigned ship. Their progress was slow and movement was restricted to crawling or short bursts of running carrying their packs, two heavy radios, antennas and batteries. Once in their designated "area of operations (AO)", as

“forward observers (FOs)” for naval gunfire, adjacent to Airfield #1, they were under continuous sniper fire.

- Upon arrival at Airfield #1, they began to dig into their two fighting positions, one for each radio. At this point, disappointment swept the team when discovered their two radios, one to coordinate naval gunfire/ close air support and the other to communicate with division’s Marine units (infantry and 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment Artillery Marines ), were inoperable/dead from salt water damage sustained during the “ship to shore maneuver” on their Higgins boat.
- The JASCO lieutenant ordered your dad to return to the beach and secure a few days’ worth of replacement batteries for the team’s two radios. Due to sniper fire, land mines and bypassed “enemy spider hole” defensive positions, your dad crawled or ran in short bursts all night to reach the beach and locate spare radio batteries. Once on the beach, his challenge was to locate the 21<sup>st</sup> Marine supply depot location. Chaos still prevailed on the beaches due to enemy fires. Batteries loaded into his back pack, his return trip to the team’s defensive position was even more hazardous during the daylight than the night before.
- During this hazardous journey, your dad vividly recalls, being exposed to the smells of rotting corpses, burnt flesh and gun powder. At no point, was your dad secure from incoming mortar fire, sniper rounds or omnipresent anti-personnel mines.
- Once he returned to Airfield #1, totally physically exhausted, (no sleep for 36 hours) replacement radio batteries in hand, he saw several destroyed Japanese aircraft adjacent to their defensive position. At one point, he spotted an enemy sniper in a fighting position under the wing of a destroyed Zero. His team dispatched the sniper once he exposed his head from his “spider hole” in an effort to kill a nearby Infantry Marine.

- Daily, the JASCO team was assigned a different naval vessel for “call for fire” assignments. Your dad recalls coordinating naval gunfire with the *USS Nevada*, a Pearl Harbor survivor, as well as the new Iwoa Class battleship, the *USS Missouri*. The Missouri was equipped with new, more powerful and accurate, 16” guns.
- On the second day of the JASOC team’s Airfield #1 position, they discovered large number of Japanese’s had infiltrated the Marine defensive perimeter during the night. Your dad’s team, was surrounded and fought as infantry. They called for both artillery fire and naval gunfire near their position. Unfortunately, some of the fires fell short, and several nearby Marines became casualties. Your dad recalls yelling into the radio to “cease fire, cease fire”. It took follow-up Marine infantry units a half of the day to clear the infiltrators from their fighting positions. Unfortunately, during your dad’s 35 days on Iwo, he witnessed many “friendly fire”, fratricide incidents.
- Your dad’s daily duties/assignments during the entire campaign, included forward observer duties, laying telecom wire, repairing telephone wire, coordinating naval and air fires with the assigned radios and defending their location from Japanese infiltrators. His intense training on Guam was now paying dividends. A tactic and strategy employed by the enemy was nightly forays behind Marine lines to cut telephone wires, lay mines in previously cleared areas and plant booby traps. In essence, for the first 15-20 days of the campaign, there were no real safe zones on the island. Your dad’s duties each morning, was to crawl along telecommunications wires to locate and repair damaged lines.
- On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, D-day +4, a 40 man platoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> Marines Infantry Regiment, headed to the top of Mount Suribachi with an American flag in hand to be erected on its summit. Your dad vividly recalls hearing the off shore ships sounding their horns and blowing whistles as the flag was secured by a small team of Marines. Your dad knew the battle was not over, for combat action surrounded his position all that day as the enemy

became enraged at the site of an enemy flag being raised on Japanese territory. Four hours later, another six man team raised a much larger flag. That flag raising was the iconic event, captured by UPI photographer Joe Rosenthal and to this day, serves as the greatest documented event of WWII.

- On March 4<sup>th</sup>, your dad witnessed the first of many heavily damaged B-29s make an emergency landing on Airfield #1. The damaged aircraft drew enemy fire in an attempt to destroy the large aircraft on the runway. They were unsuccessful on the first bomber landing, but honed their targeting capabilities for later emergency bomber landings. During the entire campaign, approximately 852 B-29s made emergency landings on Iwo Jima's two airfields saving hundreds of crew members.
- Nights on Iwo, your dad experienced "star shells" illuminating the battlefield to deter and discourage enemy infiltrations penetrating Marine defensive perimeters. Your dad's team called for illumination shelling on their assigned nights from off shore battleships and heavy cruisers.
- Even with illumination, the enemy conducted small (squad sized 8-12 man) "Bonzai" attacks toward the end of the campaign in the northern areas of the island nightly. All were met with Marine rifles, bayonets, machine guns and grenades.
- Your dad recalls hearing on a nightly basis early in the campaign, the Japanese calling out in perfect English... "Help me, I'm wounded or Corpsman help." This practice was never effective after the first couple of nights on Iwo. Instead, Marines, established a very strong "buddy system" where two to three Marines, never left each other's sight.
- Navajo Indian tribal members, aka... "**Code talkers**" were invaluable. During the Iwo campaign, three were assigned to each infantry company as communications specialists. As a footnote in Marine Corps history, during the war in the Pacific, the Navajo Code was never broken by the Japanese

intelligence specialists. Your dad saw many of these heroes as they fought and died alongside their fellow Marines.

- Another threat witnessed by your dad often were the extensive “booby traps” planted by the enemy. They knew the Marine proclivity for taking souvenirs from dead enemy and developed many ingenious explosive devices. Many were left in caves or bunkers to be found by marauding Marines. Additionally, enemy dead often had grenades under their bodies placed by the comrades. As a Marine turned the body to search for souvenirs or items of intelligence (maps, codes, etc.), the grenade would detonate killing or injuring many nearby Marines.
- As the battle wore on, inexperienced and poorly trained replacement Marines, were integrated into various units especially the infantry line companies. Often, a white stripe was painted on the back of their helmets to signal more experienced and battle seasoned Marines, who would mentor the replacements on combat survival skills. The replacements lacked the combat knowledge that other Marines experienced on Bougainville or Guam. Additionally, most had not undergone the intensive training with their new units on Guam. The result, they were easy targets for Japanese snipers due to their field mistakes. One afternoon, on the northern part of the island, your dad witnessed three replacement lieutenants killed by sniper fire as they were leading their new platoons in assaulting enemy positions. Your dad saw their mistakes as they attempted to maneuver toward the dug-in enemy positions in Cushman’s Pocket. As an F.O., attached to the infantry, there was nothing he could do to prevent their demise.
- Your dad related an incident where the JASCO team took refuge in an enemy pill box, filled with enemy dead. The tunnel access located in the pill box had been destroyed/sealed by a large demolition charge earlier that day. After catching some much needed sleep, they noted a wall with canned “fish heads” and Saki. Even though they were hungry and thirsty, they adhered to command guidance and did not try either “delight”. It was

a known fact, the enemy often poisoned some food stocks and alcohol containers in an effort to inflict casualties.

- During the battle for “Cushman’s Pocket” (see below for battle details), your dad had a “near death” experience during an artillery attack on his team’s defensive position. As he dove from a shallow shell crater to a deeper one, a large piece of shrapnel struck and was stopped by his loaded back pack as he hit the wall of the new crater. When his buddy, pulled the piece of shrapnel from his back pack, it was still hot.
  
- Your dad’s worst day on the island.... The team was near Airfield #2 coordinating Naval gunfire toward Cushman’s pocket. As usual, the team had established two fighting/observation positions for self-protection and protection of the radios. However, an enemy observer noted (probably) and spotted the two radio antennas; called for mortar fire on their two positions. Your dad’s buddy throughout the campaign, Elmer Mueller, had just left the protection of your dad’s crater. He moved to the location where the lieutenant and Pfc. Paul Heaney were sheltered. That position sustained a direct hit, killing Mueller instantly and seriously wounding the lieutenant (loss of both legs) and Pfc. Heaney. Your dad’s grief and sorrow were deep and lasting. After seventy years, he vividly remembers the horrendous events of that day. Your dad does not know the medical outcome of either the lieutenant or Pfc. Heaney, but assumes both died due to the severity their wounds before evacuation to a hospital ship. He never saw nor heard from either of them again.
  
- Your dad also had a “near death” experience adjacent to Airfield #2 when a Marine Sherman 75mm tank attracted considerable fire from the enemy as it moved against a several, well camouflaged machine gun positions. Your dad was laying comm wire within 25 meters of the tank, when it sustained a direct hit. 75mm ammunition within the tank began to explode sending pieces of shrapnel over your dad’s head as he lay prone in an attempt to avoid being hit. None of the tanks crew escaped the ensuing inferno.

- One of his last memories before being medically evacuated with an almost terminal case of pneumonia, was when he visited the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division Cemetery to visit the grave site of a buddy from Ohio. He had trained with this man the previous year. Three cemeteries, one for each Division, were constructed during the battle.
- His parent unit, 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company, as part of the “Assault Troops” of the Fifth Amphibious Corps, United States Fleet Marine Force was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation ... In part ...Quoting the citation:
  - “For extraordinary heroism in action during the seizure of enemy Japanese held Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, February 19<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945.”

### **Post Iwo Jima**

- The damp, wet conditions, led to many medical problems due to very poor hygiene and extreme physical exhaustion. Most Marines got less than three hours sleep a day. Their diet consisting of “K rations” was not an adequate nor a balanced diet to maintain any level of strength and stamina. Your dad did not shave, shower or change his dungarees during his entire 35 days on Iwo. Dysentery, pneumonia, infections due to untreated wounds/cuts and sinus problems caused by the black, very loose volcanic ash were constant. Before being evacuated from Iwo, your dad became very ill from a sinus infection and contracted an extremely virulent case of pneumonia.
- Your dad was medically evacuated to a navy hospital on Guam where the first of 80 shots of the new wonder drug, “Penicillin” were administered for his sinus infection and pneumonia.
- From Guam, he was evacuated to a Hawaiian naval facility. While in bed, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Your dad recalls the great, loud and lively celebration in his hospital ward. The wounded and

convalescing Marines and Naval personnel from Saipan and Iwo, thought that would end the war that week.

- From Hawaii, your dad was shipped to Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. It was here, that another huge celebration swept the hospital as V-J Day, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 (the surrender of the Japanese Empire) was declared, ending the most, bloody war in human history.
- From Balboa Hospital in San Diego, he was shipped to the naval hospital at the Great Lakes Naval Station for final set of penicillin shots and recuperation from pneumonia.
- Each of his three hospital stays were characterized by the horrors of war in the Pacific. He was surrounded by severely-wounded or burned Marines and Naval personnel. The hospital wards were crowded with men wondering what the rest of their lives held for them, due to loss of limbs, sight and horrific burns.
- His lasting memories of “Sulfur Island” are:
  - “How lucky he was not to be wounded or killed”.
  - The everlasting devastation he witnessed.
  - The many, many men who were wounded or killed.
  - He related in somber tones...“War is a waste” ....no one who has seen what he saw, would ever want to experience it again.
  - The smells and sounds of Iwo will never leave him.
- Your dad’s feelings are reflected and described by Lieutenant Patrick Caruso, K Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines in his book “Nightmare on Iwo” who wrote the following while recuperating on Guam from his bullet wounds ...

“My senses had been put to the test on that island by the stench of honorable death; penetrating odor of earth-shattering shells; the weird

whistling of ricochet; the piercing shrill of buzz bombs; the horrible, agonizing cry of a wounded Marine calling for a medical corpsman; the stirring sight of those determined men who fell to a permanent position of death in their last step toward the enemy; the cruddy feel of the island's filthy black ash that clung to my skin!"

- As a former Marine and Iwo Jima survivor, your dad wants to be remembered for always:
  - Accepting personal responsibility.
  - Doing what he was asked and assigned to do.
  - Doing his Marine duty the best he could at all times.
  - Never passing his work to someone else.
  - Fighting and serving for the "buddy" next to him.
  - Proud of his time in the Marine Corps and exemplifies the motto "Once a Marine, always Marine" and patriot.
  - A loyal and proud member of the Naples Florida Marine Corps League (MCL).
  
- Your dad was discharged as a Corporal from the Marine Corps at the Great Lakes Naval Station on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946; two years after he took "the Oath", finally cured of the sinus infection and pneumonia that he had contracted on Iwo from the black volcanic ash and the wet damp conditions.
  
- Upon returning to southern Ohio, he married the love of his life Marjorie in late 1946. Unfortunately, she passed from cancer in 1959. Harold was faced with the extreme challenge of raising four children himself. Today (2019) his four children, Cathy, Rick, Connie, and Patty maintain close communications with their dad, an Iwo Jima survivor. His family has grown from four children to eight grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. He still resides in the Naples, Florida house he purchased in 1972 and looks forward to Tuesdays, Marine Corps Luncheon with his "Marine brothers and sisters".

## **BATTLE of IWO JIMA**

### **Background**

Iwo Jima was part of the Japanese inner defensive perimeter protecting the homeland with two completed airfields, anti-aircraft guns, naval defense artillery and a radar site. Known as the "Sulfur Island", this 7.5 square mile volcanic island is located 650 miles south of Tokyo and 700 miles north of Guam. Characterized by a cone shaped extinct volcano, Mount Suribachi (556 feet in elevation) and shaped similar to a pork chop, it contained no harbor and was covered with a thick layer of black volcanic ash. There were no trees or jungle flora/vegetation. In a number of areas, it leaked sulfur laden steam, creating an eerie appearance. There were no natural water sources on the island. Water was collected during the rainy season and stored in barrels in caves by the local villagers before the battle.

Prior to the war, and until early 1944, it had one small village (Motoyama Village) of 1,100 Japanese residents. The residents were living a subsistence life growing coconuts, sugar cane, pineapples, bananas and small vegetable plots. The villagers also had a small sulphur extraction mine for export to their homeland, Japan. A subsistence standard of living was sustained through the export of sugar cane, pineapples and sulfur. In addition to the small village housing center, it also had a small airport, an Inn for visitors and a primary and secondary school.

In late June 1944, the Japanese evacuated the native island population to Japan, except for 400 able bodied men under the age of 40. These men were then assigned the grueling work of creating the vast subterranean defensive structures and fortified defense works.

Geologic features on the island besides Mount Suribachi, which were exploited for building fortified weapons positions, included many volcanic caves, lava ridges/terraces and small valleys/gorges of volcanic rock formations. On the northern end of the island were several hills of 300 to 400 feet in elevation where sulfur steam and smoke puffed from many locations, indicative of volcanic activity below the surface of the island.

### **Japanese Perspective**

The Japanese island garrison of approximately 21,000 was commanded by a 7<sup>th</sup> generation Samurai, Lieutenant General Kuribayashi. His ancestors had been warriors for generations and he was destined to be a military leader. His many military assignments included tours in both the United States and Canada. In the late 1920's, he was assigned to the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C. In this capacity, he often toured the country learning English and gaining an appreciation of the industrial potential of the USA. He also had a military liaison assignment at Fort Bliss, Texas, where he studied cavalry tactics and the employment of armor with light infantry units. These tactics served him well in the 30's while fighting in China as a commander.

In a letter home he stated... "The United States is the last country in the world that Japan should fight" due to its vastness, industrial might and energetic people. He had combat tours in China during the 1930's and took part in the defeat of the British army at Hong Kong. In 1943, he commanded the "Royal Guards" protecting the Imperial Palace and the Emperor and his family. During this assignment, he had the distinguished honor of having a personal audience with Emperor Hirohito.

In early June of 1944, Premier Hideki Tojo appointed him commander for the defense of the Iwo Jima. At that point, Kuribayashi had been in the Army for over 30 years and knew this would be an assignment of no return. He vowed upon departure from Japan, to fight like a true samurai. Iwo Jima had been Japanese soil since 1861 and was now part of their inner ring of defense for the homeland islands.

On June 13, 1944, the Iwo Jima radio station picked up broadcasts from Marians announcing a large American fleet had begun shelling Saipan. Two days later, on the June 15<sup>th</sup>, the D-Day for the Saipan invasion, seven US aircraft carriers conducted air attacks on Iwo, destroying several enemy aircraft on the ground and shooting down ten others that had attempted to thwart the air raids.

On June 24<sup>th</sup> 1944 the US aircraft carriers returned in an effort to destroy the two airfields, any remaining aircraft and strong point defenses under construction. On

this occasion 80 Japanese planes responded to battle over and near the island. Only ten Japanese aircraft survived this engagement.

Periodically from July 1944 until the invasion on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the island was subjected to high level bombing from Saipan using B-24s “Liberators “and occasional offshore naval bombardment. To commemorate the third anniversary of “Pearl Harbor Day”, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944, the US dropped 800 tons of bombs delivered by B-29s and B-24s on Iwo. These bombing attacks were followed by two large flights of fighter bombers which fired rockets and bombed various targets. Finally that day, the Navy conducted a 75 minute naval bombardment with its heavy guns from their battleships and cruisers. Post battle estimates showed these attacks did minimal damage to the subterranean facilities.

Additionally, the US Navy isolated the island from resupply with a tight ring of submarines, Naval and Marine fighters and Marine B-25 bomber attacks. Air reconnaissance flights flown by both the Navy and Air Force, whose mission was to locate for interdiction any ships headed to Iwo from Chichi Jima. These tactics proved to be very effective, for few supplies, equipment and personnel successfully arrived in early 1945. One of the enemy’s most devastating combat equipment losses was a ship transporting a battalion sized contingent of Japanese armor/tanks and their crews. A submarine had located and destroyed the ship before it reached Chichi Jima.

In November 1944, Iwo Jima faced a new threat and an enemy which was to be a very formidable foe. The Army established the U.S Army’s 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force in the Marianas; on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Guam. These new air force bases extended the reach of their bombers (B-24s and B-29s) significantly to include Iwo Jima. Once the new high altitude B-29 fleet arrived on the Mariana chain of islands, mainland Japan was within reach for daily bombing raids.

Chichi Jima, a small island (12 square mile) 150 miles north of Iwo, had a seaplane facility, small port and one airfield all defended by anti-aircraft guns and 3,000 Japanese soldiers. Its critical mission was to serve as the resupply terminal for Iwo, as well as a communications facility to alert Tokyo of US bombers. Supplies and equipment were off loaded from larger transport ships to small boats for

transport to the beaches of Iwo. Critical supplies based on Chichi Jima were bags of cement and steel reinforcement bars for constructing bunkers, barrels of potable water, food, ammunition, armored vehicles and artillery.

The bombing campaign of Iwo Jima by the 7<sup>th</sup> US Air Force from June 1944 until D-Day, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945, would prove to be the longest of the Pacific war. Unfortunately due to the defensive strategy and tactics employed by General Kuribayashi, the bombing efforts proved insufficient in damaging the vast majority of the fortified defensive structures, tunnels and caves. Additionally, few of the enemy personnel were killed or wounded and minimal damage was inflicted on the ordnance housed within the caves and tunnels. In post battle reports, it was noted that very few of the islands defenders were killed or wounded in these aerial attacks.

#### **General Kuribayashi Strategy for Defending the Island:**

- Knowing once the battle began, he would not receive reinforcements or resupply, his plan was to inflict as many casualties on the enemy as possible in an effort to discourage an invasion of the homeland of Japan. He and his army of approximately 21,000, were bound by the ancient Bushido code, “Die with Honor”. The garrison understood, they would be fighting in complete isolation with no naval or air support.
- He had concluded based on studying the entire islands beach areas, that the Marine landings would be limited to a two mile stretch of beaches on the southeast coast due to terrain, tidal and surf conditions. He planned his defensive strategy based on that assumption. He would not attack the invaders until a significant number were crowded on the volcanic beaches at which time he would unleash a massive “time on target” concentrated artillery fire on the beaches or approaching landing craft.
- His strategy consisted of three bands of defense containing five defense sectors running from the south (northern base of Mount Suribachi) to north across the island. Mount Suribachi had a separate, semi-independent defense and was defended by approximately two thousand enemy. The mountain caves were transformed into deep firing positions, for artillery,

heavy mortars and naval guns. The caves and their entrances had been fortified with reinforced walls and doors and were well camouflaged. At the base of the mountain, avenues of approach were mined and equipped with anti-tank ditches. The ditches had numerous mortars zeroed on them for inflicting maximum casualties on assaulting Marines. His weapons used smokeless powder, making the spotting of their location for Marine and Naval observers very difficult.

- To build the many miles of tunnels and the reinforcement of the volcanic caves, Kuribayashi had augmented his army with a Naval Construction Battalion made up of a number of former miners, draftsman, stone masons and demolition experts from the mainland. The tunnels and many of the natural volcanic caves were equipped with ventilation pumps and electricity powered by small electric generators. Other lighting was provided by gas lamps or candles.
- Most of the several hundred pillboxes, bunkers and heavily fortified machine gun positions were connected to a system of more than thirteen miles of tunnels, permitting the fighting occupants to retreat until the Marines passed their positions, thinking their position was neutralized. Then they would reemerge behind Marine advancing units, to wreak havoc on other unsuspecting Marines. In essence, there were no front lines during the first 10-14 days of the battle.
- Some tunnels were equipped with small tracks to assist in the rolling out of crew-served weapons into firing position and then retracted after firing several rounds. Steel doors were in place at many fortified positions to protect and conceal heavy weapons. Heavy 75mm machine guns, artillery pieces, rockets (Screaming Mimes) or heavy siege mortars were rolled out, fired and withdrawn into the tunnel or cave before Marine artillery or Naval gunfire could pin-point their location. The siege mortars rounds were the size of a 55 gallon drums and could be seen by the naked eye hurling toward their pre-designated target. The impact of such a large round was catastrophic on any vehicle or person in the area. The heavy siege mortar

left a very large crater, that was often a secondary pre-selected point for small mortars knowing the Marines' would jump into the siege mortar crater for protection.

- Tanks were buried up to their turrets, camouflaged, and protected with concrete blocks. Anti-aircraft guns were rolled into caves and cranked down to be used as anti-armor weapons. Both techniques proved very difficult targets for the Marines to neutralize on the ridges, hills and gorges of the northern part of the island.
- Kuribayashi's men mastered the "art of camouflage", which they employed at every fortified position, as well as at "dummy" positions. These dummy positions proved successful in forcing the Navy and Army air crews to waste ordnance and bombs on unoccupied locations. For additional protection as well as camouflage, black volcanic sand was often used to cover the outside walls and roofs of these well defended positions.
- Every fortified position and strong point was planned with interlocking fires from other defensive positions, thus providing overlapping zones of fires. In addition, "avenues of approach" to every strong point were saturated with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines.
- Kuribayashi supplemented his infantry squads with cheaply manufactured 88mm mortars, thus increasing his light artillery exponentially. Such crews were extensively trained on the effective employment and sighting of these weapons during the months of intense training in preparation of the invasion. During the battle, these weapons devastated many Marine positions.
- During the months of planning and developing his "defense in-depth" strategy, artillery crews surveyed and documented coordinates for every square yard of terrain for "pre-planned" fires from artillery, heavy mortars or infantry mortars. The result... there were no safe places on the island for any military activity; *e.g.*, field hospitals, fuel depots or ammunition storage

locations. During the first two weeks of the battle, all of these were successfully targeted by the enemy's ordnance.

- Openings to all fortified positions, including cave entrances on Mount Suribachi and the numerous ridges and hills on the northern third of the island, had fortified entrance barriers and small apertures for machine gun or sniper use. Many camouflaged pill boxes had walls reinforced with five foot thick concrete, which made them impregnable to Marine bazooka, rocket, tank and artillery fire.
- General Kuribayashi's command headquarters facility was located on the north end of the island, adjacent to "Nishi Ridge", and was constructed 75 feet below ground. Its surface structure, the command and control bunker, housed 20-30 Japanese communication cadres and had a reinforced concrete roof eleven feet thick. Its primary mission was to communicate and coordinate commands with subordinate units on the island. Additionally, Kuribayashi provided battle status updates to Chichi Jima and Tokyo.
- General Kuribayashi's tactical strategy ordered that no Banzai attacks be launched, which had proven to be futile efforts on all previous island campaigns. Instead, he ordered his men in fortified positions to fight until neutralized. Also, he trained and encouraged small teams (3-5) and individual night infiltrations to be conducted behind Marine lines. With one exception of an attack late in the campaign, a Banzai charge/attack lead by the Japanese Admirable Ichimaru, all other sub-commanders in the five defense sectors adhered to the General's orders and held their positions.
- Lastly, General Kuribayashi's tactical plans directed that the first three of five assault waves be permitted to land unopposed, thus crowding the beaches with men and vehicles. He knew the volcanic sand would not permit the vehicles to traverse the beaches easily, making them susceptible to rocket and artillery fires. This strategy unfortunately proved to be valid,

with thousands of Marines and numerous vehicles trapped on the beaches and the three small beach terraces inland of the two mile stretch of beach.

### **American Order of Battle and Perspective**

The battle for Iwo Jima was the largest Marine Corps battle ever conducted, with approximately seventy-two thousand Marines hitting the beaches, supported by thousands of Navy and Army personnel. Entitled “**b**”, it consisted of three Marine Corps Infantry Divisions: the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> were designated as the primary assault forces, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in reserve. Tactically, it was designated as the “Fifth Marine Amphibious Corps (VAC)”, with the Landings Forces commanded by Major General Harry Schmidt. General Schmidt reported to Lieutenant General “Howlin Mad” Smith, stationed aboard ship, who was in charge of “Expeditionary Troop Headquarters” and responsible for the coordination of all Marine, Navy and Army air support with his Naval and Army counterparts.

Both Marine Generals found themselves often at odds with their Navy Admiral superiors over many critical decisions before and during the battle. Both Generals were highly decorated WWI veterans who understood “defense in-depth” and fortified defense strategies based on their enemy on the Western Front of the Great War. Neither underestimated their foes’ fanaticism, based on battle reports from Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleliu and Saipan and understood it would be a bloody campaign. In all of these battles, the enemy adhered to the Bushido Code of Death, which preached... “No surrender; Death with honor”. In past campaigns, when cornered or when their defensive perimeters were broken, the enemy conducted suicidal Banzai charges into Marine lines. Senior Marine leaders expected the same employment of Banzai assaults in this campaign.

In preparation for the campaign all three divisions had undergone extensive training in preparation for a fanatical enemy defending its homeland territory, from numerous caves, pill boxes, bunkers, trenches, etc. Having received causality replacements from earlier campaigns, the average divisions reinforced strength was 23-25,000 Marines and Navy personnel (Corpsman, doctors, Seabees, and underwater UDT specialists). It was the largest Marine amphibious force ever assembled at 73,000 men.

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, recuperating and re-equipping their ranks and logistical trail, was stationed on Guam after defeating the Japanese and liberating the island.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Division was located and training in the Hawaiian Islands after recently returning from Saipan and Tinian campaigns in the Marianas. The battle for Saipan was a much more difficult task than anticipated with Marine casualties quite high. (Approximately 3,000 KIA; Over 13,000 wounded)
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Division was a recently created unit with no combat experience. However, its core, 40% of its staffing consisting of former officers and NCOs, was from recently disbanded elite Marine Raider and Paratrooper units. These Marine leaders were battle-hardened from the Guadalcanal and Bougainville campaigns. The Division was based on two Hawaiian Islands for intense combat training and amphibious rehearsals.
- It is now confirmed, no assault in Naval history had been so well rehearsed by the three divisions located on Guam and Hawaii Islands. Morale among the Marines was judged to be very high do to the high level of intense training all three divisions had just completed as they boarded their ships sailing for Iwo Jima.

The “Mission” of the campaign, as directed by Admiral Chester Nimitz, was to seize 7.5 square mile island and its two completed airfields in support of the strategic air war against Japan. To accomplish this, the enemy would have to be completely neutralized/eliminated.

The Marine senior leadership had selected, just as the Japanese commander had predicted, a two mile stretch of beaches on the southeast coast. The initial assault forces consisted of ten waves, of two regiments from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions, landing abreast. The initial assault waves were to be transported in 500 Amtracs (LVTs), Higgins boats (LCVPs ...Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) and Army DUKWs, amphibious vehicles.

The supporting fleet, the Navy's 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, consisted of 497 ships, including eight battleships and twelve aircraft carriers, 30 cruisers and numerous destroyers, destroyer escorts, troop carriers and Landing Ship Tank (LST) supply ships. To support the amphibious operation, the Navy had developed a detailed "target grid" system for each ship which identified potential targets across the entire island. Once the JASCO Marine teams were on the beach and moved inland, this grid system proved invaluable for destroying enemy fortified positions

**MG Schmidt's Corps Commander, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps (VAC) Strategy for the Attack:**

Major General Schmidt, Commander of the VAC, had no illusions of how difficult the battle would be. Isolating and neutralizing Mount Suribachi was one of his initial priorities. His supposition was once the mountain was taken, the beach areas would be significantly safer for follow-up landings of infantry, armor, artillery and logistical trail/support Marines.

The 28<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment was assigned the mission to secure Mount Suribachi, while the 27<sup>th</sup> Marines were to cut directly across the narrow section of the island, approximately one mile, thus isolating the mountain. Both assault regiments were part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division commanded by MG Keller Rockey. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division's two assault regiments, commanded by MG Clifton Cates, drew the mission once clear of the beach, to swing north and secure Airfield #1 and continue clearing the east coast area of the island.

Prior to the assault troops landing, several significant initiatives were taken.

- The Marine leaders and their staffs had requested nine days of continuous naval bombardment and air force high explosive bombings.
  - The Navy's Admiral Blandy was the overall Commander for the campaign. His experience with amphibious campaigns was minimal and ground warfare exposure was ZERO. He disagreed with the Marine Generals and reduced the pre-invasion naval bombardment to three days instead of the requested nine day bombardment.

The Admirals wanted to conserve ammunition for the impending invasion of Okinawa (April 1<sup>st</sup>, Easter Sunday, 1945).

- The first day of preparatory fire went well, however, on Day 2, clouds had moved in, preventing the air force B-24s from delivering any bombs on the island and limited the naval shelling to a half a day. Initially, Marine commanders asked for a one day postponement to permit the unused ordnance to be expended, however, they reluctantly agreed to the original invasion times, after the Navy Admirals turned down the postponement request.
- **February 16<sup>th</sup>**... three days prior to D-day... The Navy employed Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs) and mine sweepers to search for mines and to identify beach water obstacles.
- The mine sweepers located no mines.
  - The UDT specialists... searched for obstacles which would impede the landing craft and to verify surf and beach conditions. Their mission was conducted during daylight hours in full view of the enemy spotters on Mount Suribachi.
  - To cover the daylight UDT operation, the navy moved twelve LCIs (Landing Craft Infantry) to within one thousand meters of the coast. Instead of containing infantry, all had been converted to rocket gun boats. Their mission was to provide indirect fire support to the UDT men near the beach.
  - This was the one and only Kuribayashi defense directive that was violated and broke down. Thinking it was the real invasion, several enemy artillery and coastal gunners, on Suribachi, exposed their guns and positions, by firing at the small fleet of LCIs. All 12 gun boats were hit by the accurate coastal guns, inflicting casualties of 47 KIA and 153 WIA. Additionally, a

destroyer that was providing support to the UDT teams was hit and sustained 7 KIA and 35 WIA.

- Navy spotter planes noted the gun positions and called for battleship support. A number of enemy gun emplacements were neutralized, but more importantly, the Japanese had exposed other fortified positions which were taken under fire over the next two days.
- The last two Japanese Zeros, protected in reinforced concrete revetments, rose to attack the fleet, B-24s and spotter aircraft. Both were shot down by Navy fighter aircraft before doing any damage.
- Clear skies permitted B-24s from the Marianas to properly locate their targets. The naval bombardment was disciplined and organized, with each ship having designated quadrants to fire at.

➤ **February 17<sup>th</sup>...** Two days prior to D-Day

- Heavy clouds moved in during the night and did not clear until late afternoon. As a result, the 80 B-24s flew over the island, but did not drop any ordnance.
- Naval bombardment was postponed until late afternoon. Less than 40% of the shells scheduled for that day were delivered on target. The Marine Generals assumed that the allotment for the day which was not used, would be used the following day. This was not the case.
- Daytime photo reconnaissance showed that only 100 of the pre-identified 200 targets on or near the assault landing beach area had been destroyed.

➤ **February 18<sup>th</sup>...** Last day of prep fires

- Naval guns focused on pre-identified targets adjacent to the beach and Mount Suribachi.
- B-24s conducted bombings runs, but due to clouds, the effort was judged to be minimally effective.
- Navy and Marine fighters/bombers dropped large amounts of napalm on predetermined targets adjacent to the beaches as well as on Mount Suribachi... Later verified to be effective in attacking fortified positions.
- The battleships and cruisers fired from 2,500 yards off shore, while 100 plus destroyers were less than 1,000 yards firing their 5 inch guns into beach and mountain targets.
- That night, a Japanese bomber, its airfield base unknown, successfully bombed the *USS Blessman*. This high-speed, transport (APD) ship, which was carrying UDT-15, lost 18 divers, wounding another 23, as they dined in the mess galley. This was the single worse loss of skilled UDT divers in any campaign during the entire war.

**D-Day... February 20<sup>th</sup>... H- Hour...0900**

- Priority targets on and near the beach, as well as on Mount Suribachi were to be the focus of all pre-invasion fires.
- 0600 ... Naval gunfire initiates pre-invasion fires.
- 0800 ... Over 100 Marine and Navy fighters begin bombardment; rockets, bombs, napalm and machine guns.

- 0805 ... 15 B-24s arrived for a bombing run.
- 0830 ... Navy rocket ships and destroyers move close to shore for target acquisition.
- 0857 ... All support fires cease

### **Initial Assault**

- Riding 500 Amtracs (LVTs), followed by several hundred Higgins (LCVPs) boats, four Marine regiments formed abreast, and headed for “Line of Departure”. Each Amtrac carried a squad of Marines (10-12) and each Higgins boat designed as a troop carrier carried 36, plus a crew of 4 Navy personnel. Made of plywood, slow and lightly armed with only one .50 caliber machine gun, manned by a Navy gunner, they lumbered toward the beach. Many were blown out of the water by accurate anti-naval gun fire from positions overlooking the beaches on Mount Suribachi.
- 70 armored amphibian tractors (Amtracs) carrying no Marines, but equipped with 75mm pack howitzers and machine guns with mission to take up positions on the beach to provide cover for assault waves. Many of these were destroyed on the approaches to the beach as well as within 50 meters inland after hitting the beaches.
- The first three waves of Marines landed without resistance from the enemy. As predicted, the initial vehicles became bogged down in the black volcanic sands. Legs sank ankle deep in the sand, thus making rapid movement impossible. Some small Marine units were reluctant to move forward without the cover from the armored Amtracs and Sheridan tanks.

- As the 4<sup>th</sup> wave approached the crowded two mile stretch of beaches, all hell broke loose. The enemy's heavy artillery, 320mm spigot mortars, impacted along the beaches on pre-determined grid coordinators. Enemy infantry fired 25mm machine cannons/guns sweeping the beaches, and small infantry mortars (88mm) and machine guns opened up on the unprotected Marines. Hundreds of Marines were killed or wounded within minutes as chaos now reined due to dead or wounded leaders, inoperable communications equipment and oncoming assault waves landing on the beaches. Now, as prescribed and predicted by Kuribayashi, the beach areas became a prime killing zones for vehicles and men.
- Marine infantry and beach support personnel (Pioneer-Shore Party, Navy Beach Masters and Seabees) were also part of the early post assault waves (waves 11-15). Their mission was to organize the beaches for follow-up Marines and their logistical trail (ammo, water, food, medical supplies, engineering equipment, etc.) were delivered on the beaches by Army DUKWs. Also, to clear any obstacles, locate and destroy land mines and establish safe zones for follow-up waves of Marines.
- The DUKW amphibious vehicle had six large wheels and was the primary vehicle for transporting the initial artillery pieces and supplies to the beaches. They were very slow moving in the water (5.5) knots and proved to be easy targets for the enemy's accurate anti-naval shore guns. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division lost 12 of 15 of their initial 105 howitzers before they hit the beach. This loss, forced the artillery commanders to request the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's, 21<sup>st</sup> Artillery Regiment, the second day of the campaign.
- On the left of the beach lay the fortress of Mount Suribachi. To the right were rugged ridges and small cliffs. All had natural

catacombs with pillboxes and bunkers erected at their entrances. All Marine movements on the beaches were under the enemy's continuous surveillance. Eventually, Marines moved inland less than 25 yards to the first of three beach terraces for shelter from the machine gun and sniper fires. Within minutes, all three beach terraces were occupied by Marines.

- Once the enemy unleashed their beach defense strategy, casualties were extremely high at all three terraces. An example of the severe casualties, were the senior Marine commanders: Of the 24 Battalion Commanders, five were killed and seventeen wounded the first day of the campaign. Battalion staff officers stepped up and led their Marines off the beaches to their initial, preplanned objectives.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division's two regiments had two very important objectives on Day One. The 27<sup>th</sup> Marines were to move eastward across the narrow neck of the island, isolating Suribachi from the rest of the island. The 28<sup>th</sup> Marines were to move to the base of the mountain, with the mission of neutralizing enemy opposition before moving up its slopes. Both missions proved significantly more difficult than anticipated by the planners.
- It took 90 minutes for the Marines to make it to the SW coast; however, in doing so they took significant casualties neutralizing numerous enemy fighting positions along the way. Many enemy locations were bypassed in their haste to cut the mountain off from the rest of the island. This proved very costly to follow-up units thinking the area had been secured. Once the objective of reaching the western coast had been achieved, they found themselves surrounded with enemy on

the mountain firing down on them and enemy on their right flank, north of them near Airfield #1.

- Marine Corsairs provided close air support across the entire beach front and were subjected to enemy anti-aircraft guns during their bombing and strafing runs. Naval gunfire support from the off shore fleet resumed hitting the mountain and targets inland from the beaches in an effort to keep the enemy buttoned up in their fortified positions until Marine infantry could locate, close with and destroy these fortified positions.
- A machine gun platoon leader was legendary Gunny Sergeant John Basilone of Raritan New Jersey. He had earned the Medal of Honor (MOH) on Guadalcanal in 1942 as a machine gun squad NCO. He was exempt as a MOH honoree of any future combat assignments. But, he became bored on the “hero’s tours” sponsoring US War Bonds and volunteered to be with his boys. On the first day of combat, as a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines, he led a machine gun squad across the beaches toward the first major objective, Airfield #1.
- As his section approached the southern tip of Airfield #1, the enemy fired a barrage of mortar rounds on Basilone’s position. He and five Marines in his squad were instantly killed. Word spread quickly that “Manilla John”, hero of Guadalcanal had been killed after personally silencing several enemy fortified positions. He earned the Navy Cross posthumously that day for his bravery under extreme fire in neutralizing our several enemy fortified positions.
- The beachhead was secure, but not as wide and deep as had been planned for Day 1 of the campaign. The rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions Marines were landed late that day by the fleet.

The cost for the first day of battle was extremely high... 2,500 dead, wounded or missing.

- The first night proved to be exceptionally bad for the beach Marines. Kuribayashi had ordered no Banzai attacks under any circumstances. Instead, he rigorously trained his men in “wolf packs” of 4-5 night infiltrators to penetrate Marine lines and wreak havoc on the logistic encampments of the divisions. These were suicidal missions for the infiltrators, which they were honored to conduct for the Emperor. That night, they successfully penetrated the 4<sup>th</sup> Division’s defensive perimeter lines and using demolitions and grenades, they successfully detonated a very large storage area containing ammunitions, flame thrower fuel, gasoline and medical supplies. It should be noted, these types of infiltration attacks were conducted every night of the battle (36 days) across the island. Senior Marine commanders counted on non-infantry Marines to “fight as infantry” as they were trained in boot camp. With a few disastrous exceptions, they met this critical support mission.

### **Flag Raisings**

- Mount Suribachi at 560 feet high was the most prominent geological feature on the battlefield. It commanded not only the landing beaches; but also two thirds of the island for fire control observation. The mountain had catacombs of caves and fortified artillery tunnels. However, its main defensive perimeter was at its base. The mission to secure the entire mountain, denying the enemy its use as a firing and observation location could not be achieved until the fortified positions surrounding the base of the mountain were totally neutralized.

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment along with the other two Battalions, had the mission to clear the mountain of enemy activity and then move north on the western coast of the island. The 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment pivoted left, turning south at the base of the mountain, sustained horrendous casualties before getting to the summit for the first of two flag raising events. The first day, it is estimated they neutralized 60 fortified positions and the second day, 40 more as they broke the main defense line at or near the base of the mountain.
- Contrary to popular belief, including Marine Corps annals of the battle on Iwo Jima, there were three distinct flag raising events, not one or two. The most recognized and thought by most people to be the only flag raising is chronicled by the Pulitzer Prize winning photo on the summit of Mount Suribachi by A.P. photographer, Joseph Rosenthal.
- The first flag raising was accomplished on 23<sup>rd</sup> of February by members of E Company, 28th Marine Regiment of the 5th Infantry division commanded by Lieutenant Harold Schrier at 0900. Lieutenant Schrier, once on the summit, ordered Corporal Chuck Lindberg, of Northfield, Minnesota to locate a suitable structure on which to mount their small flag (58" x 28") on. Cpl. Lindberg, a former Marine Raider and combat veteran of Guadalcanal and Bougainville, located a water pipe used by the enemy to collect rain water prior to the battle. Cpl. Lindberg stated during a televised interview on CBS WCCO in the Twin Cities in 2004, that the water pipe had several bullet holes through it that were used to tie the flag to the pipe. In the photo, Corporal Lindberg is seen standing to the right of the flag as it is secured to the ground. The photograph published on a limited basis in the Marine Gazette was taken by Marine photographer Lou Lowery. Lindberg is pictured without a

weapon in the first photo. When asked in 1998 where his weapon was, he explained that he was assigned to the weapons platoon to carry a 72 pound, M-2, flame thrower. His gas tank was empty at that point and was available to assist in whatever task was presented. Corporal Lindberg survived until D +11 before being seriously wounded on Hill 362-A and medically evacuated from the island. For his bravery under fire, he earned the Silver Star and Purple Heart. He was the only survivor of the first flag raising to leave the island. All others were killed in the following weeks. Of the 252 Marines of E Company, only 12 survived the battle.

- The second flag raising, and most iconic photo of the war captured the moment of six men, five Marines and one Navy Corpsman (John Bradley) raising the “Stars and Stripes” over Japanese territory. The famous photo was taken by Joseph Rosenthal, occurred at 1400 hours the same day as the first flag raising event. However, this flag was significantly larger (96” x 56”) and was seen off shore by all ships involved in the campaign as well as by most Marines involved in horrific combat. When spotted the offshore fleet blew loud ships horns and whistles in celebration of one objective being met. Another 32 days of bloody combat remained. The photo was reproduced thousands of times and posted throughout the U.S. on billboards, trains and bus stations, newspapers and magazines. Of the six flag raisers, only three left the island alive; they were Rene Gagnon, Ira Hayes and John Bradley. The other flag raisers depicted in the photo who died in combat were: Harlon Block, Mike Strank and Franklin Sousley. The three survivors were sent home for the 7<sup>th</sup> and most successful “war bond” drive of the entire war as celebrities.

- Once the Japanese defenders near or on the summit, saw the flag, they left their fortified positions and charged the Marines. All were killed within minutes of emerging. Other enemy in a deep cave, committed suicide for the shame of knowing their mission of defending the mountain had been lost.
- In reality, fighting continued on the mountain for another week, as Marines neutralized fortified caves and bunkers with demolitions and flamethrowers.
- Today, the famous photo represents the courage of all fighting military personnel during the war. In later years, Corporal Chuck Lindberg, became known as the “last surviving flag raiser”, dying of natural causes in Northfield, Minnesota in 2007. He stated many times over the years, “Every Marine who fought on Iwo helped raise those flags and no one deserves special attention”. Spoken like a true “Hero”.
- It has been said after research by Lieutenant Patrick Caruso in his book “Nightmare on Iwo”, that military protocol and tradition were not followed in the raising of the flag on Mount Suribachi. Lt. Caruso’s research indicated... according to military protocol, the American flag is raised after control of the island has been gained and the enemy’s resistance has been eliminated. Consequently, the raising of the first and second flags over Mt. Suribachi were contrary to regulations. The battle would rage for an additional 32 days.
- On March 14<sup>th</sup>, Lt. General Holland Smith, Commanding General of the Expeditionary Forces on Iwo Jima, declared that organized resistance was no longer a threat. To commemorate this vision (not reality), a flag was raised on the highest point in northern Iwo at Kitano Point with Major General Erskine of the

3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. The ceremonial photo is not very well known and was proved to be premature. Organized combat continued for another twelve days, followed by two months of mopping-up by the Army's 173<sup>rd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT). In the "alleged mop-up", taking almost two months, two thousand more Japanese were killed, wounded or captured from their fortified caves, tunnels and bunkers.

### **Island Secured....Battle Rages**

- With the three divisions on-line moving north, through the three defensive belts, consisting of five defensive sectors, each with a Japanese commander, casualties sky-rocked. The enemy had well planned "kill zones" taking advantage of natural terrain features inflicted horrendous casualties on all Marine units. It should be noted, the enemy had nine months to assess and study every terrain feature from both a defensive perspective, as well as from the attacking forces. Pre-planned interlocking fires at all fortified positions were devastating on the Marine attackers.
- Throughout the campaign, nightly, enemy infiltrators challenged Marine lines, often successfully penetrating deep into rear echelon logistic train areas. In spite of continuous "star light naval rounds nightly", infiltrators often were successful.
- A dilemma faced by Marine Commanders was the integration of replacement personnel in all combat units due to the rapid expansion of the Corps, from approximately 10,000 men before the war, to almost 500 thousand by 1945 (six divisions and air wings). The replacements were at a considerable disadvantage for they had not experienced combat before nor gone through

the months of pre-invasion, intense unit training. Replacement lieutenants faced an extreme challenge of learning their mission, getting to know the capabilities of their subordinates and understanding the full spectrum of dangers presented by the enemy. Most companies went through 18-20 lieutenants in a unit of six cadres. Snipers and land mines often took their toll on the neophyte junior officers.

- On a significant negative note, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the battle (February 22<sup>nd</sup>), the Navy Admirals decided it was appropriate to reassign eight (8) fighter squadrons of close air support Marine Corsairs, and their aircraft carriers to Okinawa to support the impending invasion on 1 April (Easter Sunday). These aircraft with “close air support” trained pilots would surely have been useful in the next 32 days to the assaulting forces, especially in the strong fortified areas of the northern part of the island; *e.g.*, Hills, 362A, 362C, 392A and Nishi Ridge, plus Cushman Pocket and the Gorge. All of these key objectives required enormous amounts of support fires from naval ships and close air support.
- As documented by Lieutenant Patrick Caruso in his book... “Nightmare on Iwo” his unit 3rd Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, by the third day of combat, all company grade officers had been killed or wounded, 22 in total, except for Lt. Caruso. Their mission to neutralize pillboxes and bunkers proved extremely dangerous. As a junior lieutenant of Company K, Caruso became the company commander when all of his superiors were killed or wounded. Within a week, his company of 230 men, had fifteen of the original Marines still fit for combat.
- He describes the tactics for neutralizing bunkers; employing grenades, pipe demolitions, satchel charges and finally the

weapon they feared the most... the flamethrower. Nightly, as enemy infiltrators closed on Marine lines, hand to hand combat was experienced often using rifle butts, bayonets, knives and fists. Marines knew the Japanese took no prisoners and, therefore, fought for their lives on every encounter with the fanatical enemy.

- After three days on Iwo, exhaustion had set in due to lack of sleep, nightly star light/illumination barrages, not knowing if there was a land mine under each step and the stress of constant mortar and sniper fires.
- Tanks were a blessing and a curse. They were effective against many fortified positions; however, they drew intense enemy fire each time they appeared. Marine armor on Iwo paid a very high price. However, of particular success were eight converted Sherman tanks to flame thrower vehicles. Called the "Zippo" tank by the employing Marines, after the famous cigarette lighter of the time. They proved to be very effective in routing the enemy from their caves, bunkers and pillboxes.
- As Lt. Caruso stated in his book ... "There was no doubt we would take the island. The question was how much longer and how many casualties it would require."
- During his 15<sup>th</sup> day on the island, Lt. Caruso, the last original company grade officer of 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. 9<sup>th</sup> Marines was seriously wounded by bullets to his leg and hip. It took heroic efforts by his men to rescue him from his position behind a large rock before he could be captured, tortured and killed. At the time, he was surrounded by enemy and if it were not for the bravery of a few Marines who did not know him, he would have not survived the battle.

- Lt. Caruso's recollections of Iwo documented in his book were taken from personal notes he had developed while recovering from his wounds in hospitals in Guam, Hawaii and California. It was not until 1970, when he sent a paper of his experiences to the Associated Press on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima, that his notes were fully organized and published. As a result of the AP notoriety, a number of Iwo vets formed an Iwo Jima veterans society who held annual reunions for years,
- As the battle roared on for over 20 days, obviously showing how optimistic and naïve Navy and Marine leaders were, when they predicted the battle would last five to seven days, casualties continued to grow on a daily basis. For the most part, the enemy adhered to General Kuribayashi's orders to avoid "Banzai charges" into Marine positions.
- Several significant fortified areas on the northern third of the island proved especially difficult for the attacking forces to neutralize. It should be noted, at this stage of the battle that Marine coordination for air, naval and artillery support preceded each advance from their protected positions. However, the enemy had learned that after a heavy shelling of an area, the infantry, sometimes supported by tanks, would follow. The enemy retreated further into their fortified defensive positions and waited for the support fires to lift, at which time they would resume attacks on attacking Marines.
- A most difficult and challenging area of terrain to neutralize was an objective called "Cushman's Pocket" named for future Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cushman, commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines. The area's terrain was characterized by small hills, large rock formations,

ridges honeycombed with caves and many fortified bunkers and pill boxes. It was located just south of under construction, the Airfield #3. The enemy had clear observation points for directing accurate artillery and mortar fires. Part of this area's defensive tactics was to have buried tanks, antitank guns and field guns at 20 yard intervals, all in fortified positions. After the ten day battle, which was described as a "hornets' nest" of enemy activity, inflicting heavy casualties on the assaulting Marines, terrain was neutralized on March 16<sup>th</sup>. This objective was to provide the most formidable opposition of the entire Iwo Jima campaign and for the first time since moving north, the Marines held high ground viewing the enemy positions below them.

- **March 23<sup>rd</sup>**.... General Kuribayashi makes his last radio communications to both Tokyo and Chichi Jima before leading an infantry attack of 100 Japanese soldiers on Marine defensive positions in the Nishi Ridge area. He is presumed to have been killed in the assault. However, his body was never located and identified. The Nishi Ridge area housing his headquarters was finally secured on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. When 40 Marines entered the General's bunker and living quarters adjacent to "Nishi Ridge" to acquire intelligence information. They were met by a huge explosion of demolitions killing all men on the search party. Surviving witnesses described the carnage as horrific.
- **March 25<sup>th</sup>**....The last major battle took place during the night at Airfield #2. Three hundred enemy survivors successfully infiltrated through Marine lines at the airfield and killed many air force sleeping pilots by slitting their throats. The pilots had just arrived at the airfield from Saipan and were part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army/Air Force long-range fighter crews who were going to accompany B-29 strikes on Japan. In addition to the slaughter

of the pilots over 100 Marines (mostly engineers and truck drivers assigned to improve and maintain the airfield) and some Army air support crews, as well as Seabees were killed and 200 wounded. All of the Japanese infiltrators died in the night attack. This night attack on the airfield was the last organized act of resistance on the island.

- **Note...** All of the above battles were fought after the Marine Generals prematurely had declared the island secure on March 14<sup>th</sup> and performed the third flag raising ceremony at Kitano Point. It is apparent their declaration and celebration was premature and unfitting to the units still fighting the enemy on a daily basis for twelve more days.
- **March 26th...** The day “organized resistance was **AGAIN** declared over for the 5<sup>th</sup> Amphibious Corps (VAC). The Army “Regimental Combat Team”, the 147<sup>th</sup> Infantry would take another two months of “mopping up” activities. At the end of this operation, the Army reported it had killed another 1,602 enemy combatants and captured 867 POWs (mostly conscripted Korean slave laborers).

### **Battle in Retrospect**

- History has documented... “It was the most savage and costly battle in the history of the Marine Corps” ... Casualties for Marine and Naval personnel totaled 6,318 killed (KIA) and over 19,000 wounded (WIA). Additionally, over 2,500 Marines suffered from extreme battle fatigue and mental illness from exhaustion, and the stress of unrelenting combat against a fanatical enemy who rarely chose to surrender.
- The Japanese lost over 21,000 KIA and fewer than 1,000 taken as prisoners.

- An unprecedented 27 Medals of Honor were awarded/earned by Marines and Naval personnel. Only 14 survived the battle; 13 were honored posthumously.
- Casualties among Navy Corpsman were exceptionally high. Two Navy Corpsman were assigned initially to each infantry platoon to apply immediate first aid to wounded Marines. During the campaign, their casualty rate was greater than 50% KIA due to their bravery under extreme fires. One, Corpsman George Wahlen, assigned to “F” Company, 26<sup>th</sup> Marines, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division earned the Medal of Honor for his bravery under fire. Of his Company, “F” consisting of 250 men on D-Day, less than ten survived the battle and left the island without wounds.
- General Kuribayashi had directed his defending forces to inflict a prescribed goal of 10 – 1. Fortunately, that goal was not achieved, however, the combat casualty ratio of 1.25 to 1 was the highest any American ground force had ever had inflicted in WWII in any campaign. In essence, the Marines, suffered greater casualties than were inflicted on the defending enemy. Casualties on Iwo, along with the high casualties suffered during the Okinawa campaign by both Army and Marine units, gave justification to not invading the Japanese homeland, just as Kuribayashi had envisioned.
- Marine battle preparation... One noteworthy weakness was the “replacement system” for infantry line units. Each of the three Divisions was designated 2,500 replacements. They proved to be brave fighters, but their inexperience in combat and lack of

rigorous training with their assigned units, led to higher casualty rates than initial line unit members.

- Seabees... Iwo Jima was the first campaign where Seabees landed immediately following the assault waves to perform engineering support; *e.g.*, clearing beach obstacles, mines and building access roads from the beaches. The Marine “pioneer troops”, later called Shore Party Battalion, worked with the Seabees to lay “marston matt” (steel mesh) across the volcanic ash beaches and adjacent terrain to permit vehicles of various types to resupply frontline units. During the first three days on the island, the Seabees fought like infantry, especially at night where they staffed defensive positions thwarting many night infiltration attacks. They used demolitions on and near the two miles of marine invasion beaches to destroy stranded and destroyed vehicle while under constant enemy fire. Their caterpillar operators successfully towed Sheridan tanks and rocket trucks over the beaches. As the battle progressed they volunteered to carry ammo to the front line units under heavy sniper and mortar fires and often fought as infantry, especially while assigned to “night time perimeter duty”.
- Tanks once off the beaches proved their value in attacking fortified defensive positions, providing cover for infantryman to close within grenade, satchel charge or flamethrower distance. It was the largest employments of tanks, 150, during any single battle in the Pacific. Most were destroyed by the enemy especially on the northern part of the island.
- The first emergency landing on Iwo by a damaged B-29 was on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Before the war ended five months later, a total of 852 bombers had utilized the two airfields for emergency landings.

### **Rank and Awards:**

- Your dad rose to the rank of Corporal during his military tenure.
- He earned the following awards:
  - Good Conduct Medal
  - Presidential Unit Citation
  - American Defense Service Ribbon
  - Asiatic-Pacific Medal
  - WWII Victory Medal
  - Weapons “Sharpshooter” Medal (M-1 Garand Rifle)

### **WORLD WAR II in PERSPECTIVE:**

- The war was a truly global conflict, fought on all continents (except Antarctica) and oceans, killing more people than all previous wars combined. It is estimated over seventy-five (75) million died, fifty-two (52) million civilians and twenty-five (25) million military personnel. These numbers are estimates and approximates, due to the incomplete accountability of persons near or in combat zones. This is particularly true for the populations of Communist Soviet Union and China. Some sobering estimated statistics are:
  - Wartime....1937 (Japan-China) – Sept. 1945 ... 25-35 million Chinese
  - Due to some very distant battlefields and callous disregard for “enemy dead” (military and civilian), only estimates have been documented as “approximate” casualties. Often there was not enough time to count the dead, especially after massive bombing attacks in Germany and Japan.
  - Total deaths on all fronts are estimated to be 65–75 million people.

- Significant casualty numeric comparisons by some of the countries involved in World War II are as follows:
  - Communist Soviet Union... 12 – 13 MM dead... 14.2 % of population (minimal estimate)
  - Nazi Germany... 8.8 MM... 10% of population
  - USA... 460K... 32% (>1%) of population
  - Fascist Italy... 500K... 1% of pop.
  - Imperial Japan... 2.7MM... 4% of pop.
  - China... 25-35MM... .32% of pop.(minimal estimate)
  - Poland... 5.8MM... 16 % of pop (attacked by both the Nazis and Communist Soviets)
  - Philippines... 1MM... 4% of pop. Brutal Japanese occupation
  
- Marine Corps... Summary Causality Numbers of WWII
  - At war's end, the Corps consisted of six divisions and six air wings. Total end strength was 458,000 Marines.
  - Of the 16.3 million Americans who served in the wartime armed forces, 5% had served as Marines.
  - 92% of all Marines served in the Pacific Theatre.
  - Total Marine casualties list 24,511 dead and 68,207 wounded.
  
- The Marines made twenty-six successful amphibious invasions during the Pacific campaigns.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- You should all be proud of your dad's service to this country and his accomplishments. Like most combat veterans, he probably spoke very little about his combat experiences on Iwo Jima against a fanatical and tenacious enemy. From the few interviews I have conducted, I can assure you, he did his duty well and was successful during his military tenure in the finest fighting force in the U.S. military.
  
- Your dad wants to be remembered for always:
  - A patriot and loyal Marine
  - Accepting personal responsibility
  - Doing what he was asked and assigned to do
  - Doing his Marine duty the best he could
  - Never passing his work to someone else
  - Fighting and serving for the "buddy" next to him
  
- I was proud to interview him and gain valuable insight on the bloodiest combat campaign by the greatest fighting force ever created, the "United States Marine Corps." !!!!!

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