

Keystone Battle Brief:

The Battle of Iwo Jima 19 February–26 March 1945

2 March 2016

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- Intro: The Significance of the Battle: Why Study It?
 - Iwo Jima saw the employment of three Marine Divisions under a single tactical Marine command, one of the largest body of Marines committed to combat in one operation during World War II. Also this battle is significant because for the first time in the war American forces sustained more casualties than the Japanese garrison even though most of the defenders fought to the death.
 - The battle for Iwo Jima proved that with air and naval supremacy, Marines could take any heavily defended objective. The battle also reinforced the idea that amphibious assaults, something the Marines worked hard on in the interwar period, were vital to not only the Navy but to the Army Air Corps. Not every island assaulted in the Central Pacific drive had a suitable port for the Navy to refit their ships. Every island did have an airfield however which had a direct bearing on their strategic value. Iwo Jima was no exception to this general rule.
 - For the Marine Corps, Iwo Jima was the “supreme test” and became known as a classic example of a textbook amphibious assault.
 - From this battle the Marine Corps gained the respect, appreciation, and admiration of many important observers and the American public. Joe Rosenthal’s indelible photograph of the second flag raising on Mount Suribachi helped endear the Marine Corps into the hearts and minds of many.

- Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, who witnessed the flag raising from the USS *Eldorado*, said to LtGen Holland Smith “Holland, the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years.”

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- Context: Time, Place, Opposing forces
 - Grand Strategy: In the last year of WWII, the United States and her allies sought to capitalize on the momentum gained from their successes of 1944 to drive toward ultimate victory over Germany and Japan. In June of 1944, Allied amphibious forces landed successfully on the beaches of Normandy, began liberating France, and driving the German army east. That same month, the Soviet Red Army launched a huge offensive against the Germans in the east which caused the Wehrmacht’s lines to collapse and retreat west. In the Pacific, the U.S. conquest of Saipan and the Japanese defeat at Leyte Gulf, convinced Japanese leaders that victory was impossible. In Europe, the allies drove inexorably toward Berlin. In the Pacific, the U.S. sought to continue advancing toward Tokyo. General Douglas MacArthur continued his drive in the southern Pacific aimed at retaking the Philippines. All the while, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz’s drive up the central Pacific moved north toward its next target: the Bonin Islands, of which Iwo Jima became the main target. The overriding purpose of the operations was to maintain unremitting military pressure against Japan and to extend American control over the Western Pacific.

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- Strategy: Operation DETACHMENT: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the commanders of the Navy and Marine Corps’ drove their forces up the central Pacific and wanted to

turn Iwo Jima into a base from which U.S. planes could attack the Japanese home islands, protect bases in the Marianas, cover naval forces, conduct search operations of the approaches to the Japanese home islands, and provide fighter escort for very long-range operations.

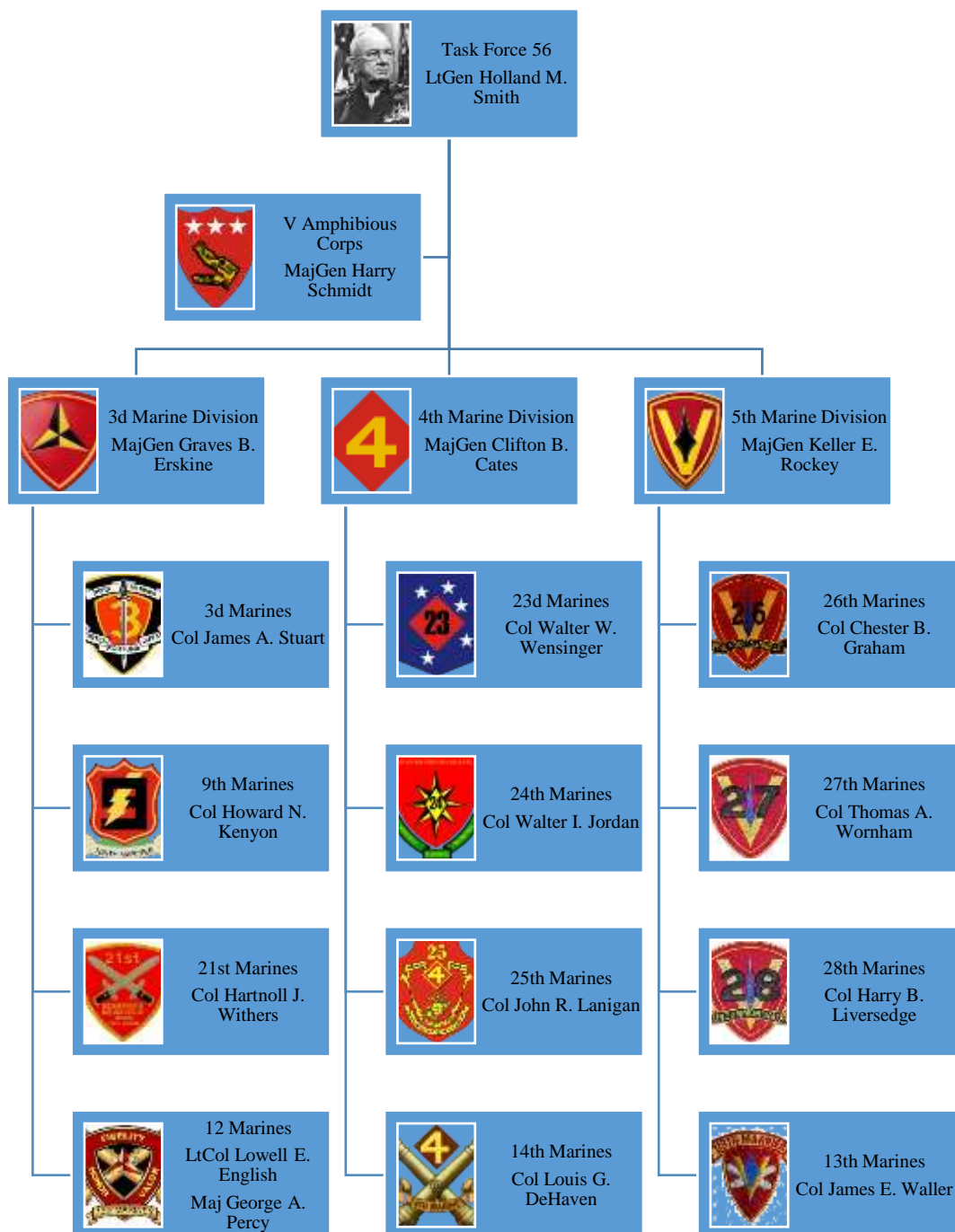
- What was at stake
 - The Japanese used Iwo as a staging point for air raids on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. Fighter planes rose from Iwo to harass long-range U.S. aircraft en route to and from bombing raids over Japan. Also, a radar station on Iwo gave Japanese home defenses more than two hours' warning of an impending bombing. American bombers had to fly long routes around Iwo to avoid its fighters and lacked an emergency field in case they needed to land. To rectify these problems and to make use of the island itself, Joint Staff planners wanted Iwo as a potential base for fighter planes, since Tokyo would be within the range of P-51 Mustangs based there. The P-51s could use Iwo as a staging area to protect the B-29 Super Fortress bombers stationed in the Marianas on their bombing runs to the main islands of Japan.
 - For the Japanese, the loss of the Marianas (Saipan, Tinian, and Guam) during the summer of 1944 greatly increased Iwo's importance. Its fall would lead to unmitigated U.S. air raids against the Japanese home islands and seriously damage not only war production but civilian morale. The U.S. Navy ended Japan's ability to conduct offensive operations in 1944. As a result, Japanese leaders believed that the defenders of Iwo should fight to the death in order to buy the Japanese mainland time to prepare their homeland's defenses. This

point is key in understanding why the Japanese altered their defensive tactics at Iwo. They knew the island would fall. To buy time, however, they would attempt to drag the battle out as long as possible, which they certainly did.

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- Commanding Generals
 - American:
 - Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, operation's overall commander
 - Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, Joint Expeditionary Force Commander (JEFCO)
 - Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, 2nd in Command of Joint Expeditionary Force
 - Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, Command of Marine landing forces
 - Major General Harry Schmidt, V Amphibious Corps (VAC)
 - Major General Graves B. Erskine, 3d MarDiv
 - 3d, 9th, 21st, and 12th Marines and supporting units
 - Major General Clifton B. Cates, 4th MarDiv
 - 23d, 24th, 25th, and 14th Marines and supporting units
 - Major General Keller E. Rockey, 5th MarDiv
 - 26th, 27th, 28th, and 13th Marines

- Simple Order of Battle and Tables of Organization of Landing forces (Division and Regimental Level)



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- Japanese:
 - Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, 109th Division and Commander of all Japanese forces on Iwo Jima
 - Major General Kotau Osuga, Commander 2d Independent Mixed Brigade
 - Colonel Ikeda, 145th Infantry Regiment
 - Defense force consisted of various Independent Tank, Infantry, Machine Gun, and Artillery/Mortar Battalions and Regiments

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- Chronology/ Phases of the Battle
 - **Plans and Preparations**
 - Planning remained flexible right up to D-Day, which was postponed twice. The naval forces needed for the assault on Iwo were engaged in the Philippines. Fifth Amphibious Corps (VAC) shifted D-Day from 18 November 1944, to 6 December and then to 19 February 1945.
 - VAC assigned the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions to assault the beach first. The 26th Marines would be held in reserve, ready to reinforce when and where needed. The 3d Marine Division would remain on ship until D-Day plus 3.
 - The 4th and 5th were to land simultaneously and abreast of each other, the 4th on the right and the 5th on the left. The 3d MarDiv would land on the same

beaches after the 4th and 5th MarDiv created a beachhead and would join the attack or play a defensive role.

- The plan called for a rapid exploitation of the beachhead with an advance in a northeasterly direction to capture the entire island. A regiment of the 5th Marine Division was designated to capture Mount Suribachi in the south.
- VAC issued an alternate landing plan which provided for a landing on the western beaches in case the wind shifts made the sea on the eastern landing zones too tumultuous. The alternate landing plan proved unnecessary.
- The eastern beaches over which the landings were to be made extended for about 3,500 yards northeastward from Mount Suribachi to the East Boat Basin.
 - VAC divided the beaches into 500 yard segments, which from left to right were designated as Green, Red 1 and 2, Yellow 1 and 2, and Blue 1 and 2.
 - 5th MarDiv, landing over Green, Red 1, and Red 2 beaches, was to advance straight across the island, which at this point formed a narrow isthmus, until it reached the west coast. At the same time, it was to hold along the right, while part of the division wheeled to the south to capture Mount Suribachi.
 - 4th MarDiv was to move right into the center of the isthmus, while its right flank swerved to the north to seize Motoyama Plateau, the high ground north of the east coast basin.

- Suribachi and the Motoyama plateau had to be taken as soon as possible because they overlooked the beaches and permitted the enemy to fire at the exposed Marines at will.
- Once the southern portion of Iwo Jima had been secured, the two divisions could join in a combined drive to the north. At this time, the 3d Marine Division, initially in Expeditionary Troop Reserve on board ships near the beachhead, could be disembarked and landed to assist in maintaining the momentum of the VAC attack.

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- Japanese Defense
 - By the time of the invasion, the Japanese garrison totaled between 21,000 and 23,000 soldiers and naval personnel.
 - The Japanese created strong, mutually supporting positions, which were to be defended to the death, including nearly 11 miles of tunnels. In the past, on Saipan, Tarawa, and Peleliu, for example, Japanese defenders tried to stop Marines' invasions on the beach. Subsequently, the Japanese would order nighttime frontal counterattacks against Marine positions, demonstrating their bravery and zeal, but needlessly sacrificing many lives. Iwo Jima would be different mostly. Because he sought to buy his homeland time, General Kuribayashi forbid large scale and reckless counterattacks or *bonsai* charges (although some did occur). There would be no withdrawals either. He planned to defend the Island until death and make the Americans pay dearly for every

inch of it. U.S. planners believed they could take the Island in 14 days; Kuribayashi proved them wrong.

- The southern portion of Iwo in proximity of Mount Suribachi was organized into a semi-independent defense sector. Fortifications included casemated coast artillery and automatic weapons in mutually supporting pillboxes. The narrow isthmus to the north of Suribachi was to be defended by a small infantry force.
- A main line of defense, consisting of mutually supporting positions in depth, extended from the northwestern part of the island to the southeast, along a general line from the cliffs to the northwest, across Motoyama Airfield No. 2 to Minami village.
- The entire line of defense was dotted with pillboxes, bunkers, and blockhouses. Immobilized tanks were carefully dug in and camouflaged to further reinforce the fortified area. The broken terrain of Iwo Jima itself supplemented the Japanese defenses.
- A second line of defense extended from a few hundred yards south of Kitano Point at the very northern tip of Iwo across the still uncompleted Airfield No. 3, to Motoyama village, and then to the area between Tachiwa Point and the east boat basin. This second line contained fewer man-made fortifications, but the Japanese took maximum advantage of natural caves and other terrain features.

- As an additional means of protecting the two completed airfields on Iwo from direct assault, the Japanese constructed a number of antitank ditches near the fields and mined all natural routes of approach.
- Many of the defenders wore white headbands, similar to the ones worn by *kamikaze* pilots, to demonstrate their determination to die in defense of the island. Inside the pillboxes, for all to see and burn into their minds, were copies of the “courageous battle vow,” which pledged all to dedicate themselves to the defense of Iwo, and to fight to the last with any and all weapons at hand.
 - “Each man will make it his duty to kill ten of the enemy before dying. Until we are destroyed to the last man, we shall harass the enemy with guerrilla tactics.”

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- From 8 December 1944 to 15 February 1945, bombers of the Seventh Air Force operating out of the Marianas, bombed Iwo Jima doing 30 sorties a day in the three weeks before the invasion. The bombers aimed at neutralizing the airfields, destroying gun positions, and unmasking any additional targets. As Marines were to soon find out, gun emplacements, blockhouses, pillboxes, shelters, and other strong points proved resilient owing to the thorough preparation of these installations from air and naval gun fire. The rugged terrain, replete with countless caves afforded excellent protection from high level bombing.

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- The Controversial Preliminary Bombardment: Marines vs. Navy
 - LtGen Holland Smith, who had witnessed the deadly results of Marines assaulting positions that did not receive enough preparatory bombardment on the islands of Tarawa and Saipan, concluded that ten days of intense aerial and naval bombardment of the island was necessary. LtGen Smith further advised that D-Day be made dependent on the successful destruction of enemy defensive installations.
 - Naval officers concluded differently, in part because they had other operations to consider.
 - Initial surface bombardment had to be closely coordinated with the first carrier attack against Tokyo by the Fast Carrier Force (TF 58). Admiral Spruance planned that a carrier strike on Tokyo, aimed at Japan's manufacturing and war-production centers, was to coincide with the opening of the prelanding shelling of Iwo Jima. The longer the bombardment lasted the less tactical surprise would be achieved by the Carriers against Tokyo.
 - While LtGen Smith focused solely the Island of Iwo and his Marines, Spruance and the Navy took a much broader view and considered the Iwo landings within the larger context of attacking the Japanese home islands.

- Holland sent his requests up to Rear Admiral Turner (JEFCO) who, influenced by a differing viewpoint as to Iwo's position in strategic planning, gave the Marines a three day bombardment, not ten.
- Spruance's reasons.
 - The surface bombardment had to coincide with the carrier attack upon Tokyo.
 - The prolonged air attacks that began 8 Dec should be enough.
 - Naval ammunition needed to be conserved as there would be no quick replacement
- Holland Smith and other Marines would be bitter over this for years. Having had prior experience in submitting to the Navy's plans at the cost of Marines' lives, "Naval expediency," Smith claimed later, "won again."

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- Bombardment:
 - Weather on the first day of the bombardment, 16 February, was poor which deteriorated the accuracy of naval gun crews. Rain and poor visibility caused the bombardment to start late, end early, and fire intermittently in between. None of the known Japanese coastal defense guns were destroyed that day but some

progress seemed to have been made against the anti-aircraft guns.

- Clear skies on 17 February allowed the U.S. Navy to unleash its full power upon the island. Battleships, such as *USS Nevada*, *New York*, *Tennessee*, *Idaho*, and *Texas*, supplemented by destroyers and cruisers, opened up on their assigned sectors. Men-of-war approached the island and fired on targets at point blank range. Naval air craft rained bombs from the sky. Underwater demolition teams approached the beaches in search of mines.
- At several points throughout the day, a few Japanese gun crews fired on both ships and the underwater demolition teams. It is not known if the command to fire came from Kuribayashi although it is unlikely. Japanese gun crews may have thought the demolition teams were the beginning of the main assault and therefore opened fire. This act was a serious tactical error on the part of the Japanese gun crews because they exposed their positions to naval gunnery. This error enabled the Navy to disable numerous coastal defense weapons that would have taken a terrible toll on Marines. As Isely and Crowl put it “Thus what had

been planned as a normal underwater demolition team operation, had unexpectedly developed into a successful feint of great consequence.”

- The weather on 18 February, the final day of preparatory bombardment, was not as good as the 17th but not as bad as the 16th. The bombardment had to start late due to lack of visibility from rain. But from mid-morning to 1830 the Navy unleashed what it could on the island.

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- The results of the bombardment were mixed. Half of the 65 coastal defense guns were either damaged or destroyed as well as half of the 35 heavy anti-aircraft guns. The rest of the defenses however, the small anti-aircraft guns, the pillboxes, blockhouses, and covered artillery and tank positions, survived with only about 25% of them being damaged or destroyed by the end of the bombardment. Damage to the defenders themselves was negligible, probably more than 80% of the garrison survived unscathed. The island needed a longer bombardment.
- Rear Admiral William Blandy, in overall command of the bombardment, reported to Turner on the evening of

18 February that he had enough ammunition left for a fourth day of shelling. Turner became concerned that the weather on the 19th might postpone the assault, however. Therefore he ordered the assault as scheduled for 0900 the next day.

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○ The Beach Assault

- The Navy provided covering fire as the landing crafts full of Marines began to advance toward shore at 0830 on 19 February. During the thirty-minute run to the beach the naval vessels never stopped firing and coordinated their impact zones with the positions of the initial waves.
- This movement to shore is very significant because it can be seen as the epitome of amphibious assault. It was no simple ferrying operation. Rather it was a carefully planned and executed deployment from ship to shore “packing the utmost momentum yet devised by the mind and engineering genius of man.”

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- Initial waves of men and equipment reached the beach every two to five minutes between 0859 and 0903. Thousands of men hit the beach quickly. The plan called for 9,000 men in 45 minutes. Under the cover of a continuing rolling naval barrage, the first waves of Marines from the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions penetrated inland to a depth of 150 to 300 yards. Marines of the

landing force, many of them weighted down with more than 100 lbs. of equipment and ammunition, found themselves floundering in a sea of soft volcanic ash, which made every sinking step a strenuous undertaking. The getting over the 15 foot terrace on the beach could really slow Marines down. Marines fatigued quickly. Wheeled vehicles landed soon after and then tanks were called up around 1000.

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- Japanese Response: In keeping with Kuribayashi's orders to let the Marines land and accumulate on the beach before firing, most of the Japanese artillery and mortar positions waited. Some positions fired sooner than others however. Elements of the 4th MarDiv received a few desultory artillery and mortar shells not two minutes after landing. By 0920 Marines on the Yellow and Blue beaches were reporting heavy enemy mortar fire. By noon however, the Japanese fire became furious and heavy.
- Congestion on the shore began to mount as more and more men and supplies debarked from their transports. The Japanese began to concentrate their fire on the LVT's and landing craft on and near the beaches. Mortars and artillery soon scored numerous direct hits on the hapless vessels. Jeeps and trucks emerging from those landing craft became bogged down in the treacherous volcanic ash before they could clear the ramp. Supplies and men continued to pour ashore however.

- As four Marine regiments, the 25th and 23d Marines from 4th MarDiv and 27th and 28th Marines from 5th MarDiv came ashore they began to carry out the assault plan.
 - The 25th Marines along the northern end of the landing zone advanced toward a quarry just north of the east boat basin. The 23d Marines advanced across the northern portion of Motoyama Airfield No. 1 toward Airfield No. 2.
 - The 27th Marines advanced inland in a northwesterly direction, slicing across the southern tip of airfield No. 1 and then pivoting more to the north, to reach a point west of the Airfield No. 2.

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- During 27th Marine's advance, GySgt John Basilone, famous for earning the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal in 1942, lost his life. While leading a machine gun section, Basilone destroyed Japanese blockhouses on their way toward Airfield No. 1. He then aided a tank navigate out of a dense minefield while under heavy mortar and artillery fire. As he moved along the edge of the airfield, Japanese mortar fire felled him. For his actions that day he received a Navy Cross posthumously.

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- The 28th Marines began isolating and assaulting Mount Suribachi.

- 1/28, cut across the narrow neck of the island, a distance of about 700 yards.
- 2/28 advanced about 350 yards inland, then turned toward Mount Suribachi
- For 1/28 the advance was costly due to the intensity of enemy fire coming from nearly invisible positions. 1/28 ran into a maze of mutually supporting blockhouses and pillboxes all supported by Japanese mortar and artillery. Bugged down at times and often precluded from coordinated movements, the courage of individual Marines kept the advanced from stalling. Captain Dwayne E. Mears, CO of Company B, attacked a Japanese pillbox armed only with a .45 automatic pistol. He cleared the pillbox but was mortally wounded.
- Japanese fire and Marine casualties often forced units to split up into small impromptu teams. Separated from their platoons and squads, these groups continued the advanced independently, thus helping to preserve the momentum of the attack. No one needed to tell them what they had to do.
- By 1100 elements of Company B reached the western shore of Iwo after sustaining heavy casualties. Only two lieutenants and ten men reached the western beach. Bypassed enemy positions continued to offer fierce resistance, however.

- MajGen Rockey released 3/28 from reserve at the request of 28th Marine's CO Col Harry B. Liversedge. At 1545, 2d and 3d Battalions were to step off jointly toward Mount Suribachi. In support of this assault, naval guns opened up on Suribachi and a company of tanks from 5th Tank Battalion moved up for the attack.
- Japanese artillery and mortar fire proved too heavy for the assault elements to form up properly that afternoon. The 28th Marines were forced to dig in for a long night.
- MajGen Clifton Cates' 4th MarDiv faced tough resistance on the northern landing zones as well. 23d and 25th Marines' beaches came under heavy fire due to the fact that over 30% of the enemy pillboxes near the beach and 70% beyond the beach remained intact.
 - Ten reinforced concrete blockhouses, seven covered artillery positions, and eighty pillboxes were intact and directly menacing the beaches of the 4th Division. Heavy casualties forced MajGen Cates to deploy two of his three reserve battalion landing teams rather early on D-Day.
 - These battalions advanced inland while wheeling right to clear their second beach and to scale the cliffs onto the rim of the "Quarry." They seized this objective just before nightfall but their casualties were very heavy. 3/25 had only 150 men left in its front line at the end of day one. Cates called in the 24th Marines to hold on to their gains against

any potential Japanese counterattack that many veteran commanders and Marines believed was coming.

- By evening of the first day, all Marine regiments from the 4th and 5th Divisions with supporting tanks (including all reserve battalions) were on shore: around 30,000 Marines in total. By 1700 the 5th Division had cut off Mount Suribachi and traversed the narrow isthmus. The two other regiments of the 5th Division had turned north east to help the 4th Division drive over the first airfield and up the Motoyama Plateau, which would continue on 20 February.
- Rockey and Cates began landing their artillery the afternoon of day one in preparation for the anticipated Japanese counterattack that night. Despite heavy casualties, Marines succeeded in securing a vital and working beachhead from which more men and supplies would land to continue the assault. Day one was a crucial success for the Marines, but the battle was far from over.
- There were a few small and isolated instances of nighttime infiltration by a few Japanese soldiers. But large coordinated and suicidal Japanese counterattacks, in keeping with Kuribayashi's orders and contrary to the Marines' past experiences, never materialized. Instead, the Japanese gave the Marines a long sleepless night, the first of many, by shelling their positions. The Japanese caused the most damage on the beaches where aid stations filled with wounded Marines received direct hits. Many of the wounded died this way.

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○ Suribachi

- While the rest of the 5th MarDiv and all of the 4th turned northeast to seize the rest of the island, the 28th Marines assaulted Suribachi on its own.
 - The 28th Marines, (2/28 on the left, 3/28 on the right, 1/28 in reserve) began their attack at 0830 on 20 February.
 - The assault was difficult, not only because of Japanese defenders but also because of the steep climb.
- It took the 28th Marines all day of 20 February to reach the base of the mountain. Bitter enemy resistance made split-second team work by every unit the only way ground could be taken. Each pillbox was taken in slightly different ways but a basic pattern emerged with each position.

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- Infantry and tanks (if available) fired on each pillbox while a flamethrower team worked up to one of the entrances to administer a few bursts of flame into the box.
- Then the remainder of the assault team closed in to finish the job with grenades.
- Once the defenders were eliminated, Marines used demolition charges to render the position unusable to any would be Japanese who would try to reoccupy the position after nightfall.

- When and where possible, Marines used flame throwing tanks to eliminate the pillboxes.
- 2/28 and 3/28 lost 29 dead and 133 wounded on 20 February.
- On 21 February the advance continued. 1/28 moved cleared around the western shore of the mountain and advanced 1000 yards. 2/28 advanced along the eastern side and gained about 650 yards while 3/28 moved 500 yards up the middle.
 - These gains cost the lives of 34 Marines and wounded 153.
 - By the end of 21 February only about 75% of the 28th Marines were combat effective.

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- 22 February saw driving rain and cold temperatures, which caused machine guns to jam and added to the misery of the advancing Marines. That day the Japanese still resisted with isolated pillboxes and heavy mortar and small arms fire.
 - Despite all of that, Marines finished surrounding and neutralizing Suribachi that day.
 - By 1630 on 22 February, the fight for Suribachi was virtually over, although that night numerous Japanese defenders crawled out of their defenses and made a run for it in an attempt to get through Marine lines and make it to the northern part of the island. Alert Marines picked off most of them during their flight, but a couple of dozen did make it back to Kuribayashi's command post.

- Marines climbed to the top of Mount Suribachi's 550 foot rim on Friday 23 February. Led by 1stLt Harold G. Schrier, Marines of 2/28's Companies F and E made the climb to reach the summit, secure the crater, and raise a 54 by 28 inch flag. The Marines picked for this ascent were dirty, tired, and wholly uninterested in achieving any glory or distinction that day.
 - After laboriously climbing the mountain and securing its crater, Marines set about looking for something to attach the flag to. They found a 20 foot section of pipe and tied the flag to one end.
 - While some Marines faced outboard and provided security, others raised the flag around 1020. Caught by a swift breeze, and despite being small, the flag could be seen from the ships out at sea.
 - On the ships, whistles, horns, and bells rang out in celebration

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- Three hours later, Marines raised a second flag twice as large as the original on Suribachi's summit. Joe Rosenthal's capture of this second raising resulted in perhaps the most famous photograph of WWII. That photograph was expensive for 1/28: 3 officers and 112 men killed, 21 officers and 354 men wounded during the assault on Suribachi
- Marines then put the mountain to use rushing echo and flash ranging equipment to the top in order to spot Japanese artillery and fortifications in the northern end of the island. Suribachi became a vital observation post for the Marines.

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○ **The Drive North**

- The 28th Marines' assault on Suribachi may have captured the lime light but the central and northern part of Iwo Jima is where General Kuribayashi had concentrated the bulk of his troops and defenses. Here, the Japanese sat deeply entrenched in hundreds of carefully constructed positions, ranging from blockhouses to bunkers, pillboxes, caves, and camouflaged tanks all of which had well integrated fields of fire.
- The assault north kicked off at 0830 on 20 February (D-Day plus 1). Along the 1,000 yard front in the 5th Division zone of attack, Colonel Wornham committed 1/26 and 3/27 abreast, keeping 1/27 and 2/27 in reserve.
- General Rockey had designated the 26th Marines, less 1/26 which was held in reserve, to be in positions near the southwestern tip of Airfield No. 1.
- For the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions who made the assault, the terrain and the Japanese defenses made any other tactics other than frontal assault impossible. Two divisions assaulting northwards on a relatively narrow Pacific island left zero room for large scale maneuvers.
- Marines made important advances in the center on 20 February. But the next day they found themselves flush against the main line of resistance, and the gains could only be measured in inches and feet. By-passing single strongpoints was seldom possible because the Japanese positions mutually supported each other so well.

- In position to break the Japanese main line of resistance at its only vulnerable point were the 21st Marines, the first regiment from the 3d Marine Division to engage in combat on Iwo.
 - The 21st Marines under Colonel Hartnoll J. Withers, spent three hellish days trying to reach and cross the second airfield. The Japanese had heavily mined and covered every inch of the field by interlocking fields of fire from hidden positions. Supporting tanks had a hard time crossing as well due to the heavy anti-tank fire from Japanese positions.
 - Holland Smith released the rest of the 3d Marine Division from reserve to assist in the attack with all of their supporting artillery and tanks.
 - The assault up the center aimed at Motoyama Airfield No 2. It still took several more days largely because this area had received relatively little naval bombardment. Marine artillery had to continuously barrage the Japanese there in order to move forward.
 - And that could not be achieved until all of the artillery came ashore, which took a while since the artillery pieces arrived piecemeal and only accumulated its total strength over the course of a few days.
 - All of the Marine's artillery pieces were not on shore and ready to fire *en masse* until 25 February.

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- MGen Keller Rockey's 5th Marine Division and MGen Clifton Cates' 4th Marine Division made advances on the left and right while MGen Graves Erskine's 3d Marine Division, assaulting up the middle and facing the heaviest resistance, required more artillery preparation.
 - Sgt Ross Franklin Gray of the 4th MarDiv's 1/25 is an example of what it took to for Marines to advance. Sgt Gray drew a great deal of heavy enemy fire because he was the Marine throwing satchel charges into bunkers and caves. On 21 February he systematically approached, attacked, and withdraw under blanketing fire to destroy a total of six Japanese positions, killing more than 25 defenders and destroying Japanese ordinance ammunition. For his actions he was awarded the Medal of Honor.
- After a much more concentrated barrage from naval guns, Marine artillery, and airstrikes, the 3d Marine Division began to advance at a more steady pace by 27 February (D-Day plus 9).
- The three divisions advanced. Rockey's 5th MarDiv on the left had to clean out the cliffs commanding the northeastern flank of the alternate landing beaches.
 - Within this sector stood Hill 362, which had to be taken quickly because it flanked and endangered Erskine's assault through the center.

- Cates' 4th MarDiv on the right had to move through and clear out a place known as the "Amphitheater." In their sector stood Hill 382, which posed the same problems as Hill 362 in Rockey's sector. This hill had to be taken quickly by the 4th MarDiv.
- Neither Hills 362 or 382 could be taken until Erskine's Marines advanced across Airfield No.2 and pushed on toward the Motoyama plateau. 3d MarDiv's advance up the center allowed crucial room to maneuver for both the 4th and 5th MarDiv's to take the hills in their sectors.
 - During the 5th MarDiv's assault on Hill 362, PHM1 (Doc) John Harland Willis earned a Medal of Honor, posthumously. Doc Willis fought hand-to-hand with Japanese who were defending the hill. Then, while administering plasma to a wounded Marine, Japanese soldiers threw a total of nine grenades at his feet. Doc Willis managed to throw eight back; the ninth one got him. His actions are testimony to the bravery that Navy Corpsman demonstrated throughout the battle.
- Erskine's 3d MarDiv drove across Airfield No. 2 and advanced up onto the Motoyama Plateau. By doing this, the Marines denied the Japanese the ability to observe Marine movements across the island. The 3d Division quickly overran the third airfield but then ran into the Kuribayashi's second major line of defense. The assault slowed to a crawl again.

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- The first week of March saw negligible gains at first. Only the 3d MarDiv made substantial forward progress against the northwestern high ground in its sector. But flanking fire from Japanese defenders in the 5th MarDiv sector, (Rockey's Marines had not reached that far yet) kept Erskine's men at bay.
 - All advances halted on 5 March so that the three Marine Divisions could regroup, refit, and reorganize.
 - March 6 saw a rather bold shift in Marine tactics. Erskine's 3d MarDiv launched a night attack. Earlier, units in the other division had jumped off at first light without preparatory neutralizing fires, and had obtained an element of tactical surprise.
 - This time Marines stepped off well before sunrise (0500) and gained several hundred yards without having to fire a shot. As the Japanese realized what was going on the struggle that ensued became desperate. Isolated groups of Marines fought hand-to-hand with a determined enemy, or often became pinned down by intense fire from Japanese positions.
 - Despite the terrible fighting that ensued, Marines caught the Japanese unawares the morning of 7 March, many Japanese died in their dugouts while they slept.
 - The attack led to high Marine casualties. Erskine's 3d MarDiv casualties were so high that a second night attack was impossible due to a lack of experienced personnel. However, the 21st Marines on 9

March reached the ocean along the northeastern coast, effectively splitting the enemy into smaller more manageable pockets.

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- All three divisions had to advance through very difficult terrain that was well suited for defense. Cates' 4th MarDiv had to operate at only slightly higher than 50% of its combat strength through terrain that became known as the "Amphitheater," and the "Meat Grinder." Cates' 4th MarDiv did most of the hand-to-hand fighting on the island due the fact that they loaned out many of their tanks to the other divisions.
 - On the night of 8/9 March, the Japanese in Cates' sector lost contact with Kuribayashi's command post and then broke tactical protocol, much to the 4th MarDiv's benefit. 700 Japanese left their positions and charged the Marine's lines; they were quickly mowed down. The 4th MarDiv reached the northeastern coast of Iwo Jima the next day, 10 March.
- Rockey's 5th MarDiv probably had the worst terrain to advance through, however. They confronted the most formidable terrain obstacles found on the island that included a maze of gorges and ravines and a final pocket of prepared pillboxes and caves in which Kuribayashi was thought to have placed his command post.
 - The 5th MarDiv had to continue the struggle in its sector, with a combat efficiency below 30%, for ten days after the 4th MarDiv had begun re-embarkation.

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- LtGen Holland Smith and Admiral Raymond Spruance declared the island secure on 16 March at 1800. However, Marines suffered another 1,724 casualties before this statement would be actually true.

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- The last pockets of resistance fell to the 5th Marine Division. New flame-throwing tanks helped immensely with clearing out the hopeless maze of rugged terrain and Japanese hidden bunkers and pillboxes. They finally cleared out what was left by 26 March (D-Day plus 34).
- Kuribayashi's body was never found, but it is believed he committed suicide in the northern corner of Iwo Jima in the final days of the battle. His suicide may have taken place soon after Marines detonated four tons of explosives, which turned his command post into a large tomb on 21 March.

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- Incredibly, despite all of the death and the destruction or sealing off of Japanese caves, two major Japanese suicide assaults occurred on or after 26 March.

- Early on 26 March, a force of between 200 and 300 Japanese soldiers executed a well-organized attack on Marine and Army units encamped near the western beaches.
 - Marines from the 5th Pioneer Battalion, an African American unit, steadfastly held their ground and were instrumental in killing most of the Japanese in this assault.
 - One of the 5th Pioneer Battalion's platoon commanders earned a Medal of Honor posthumously during this attack. 1stLt. Harry Linn Martin charged four Japanese who overran a Marine machine gun position. Being shot several times, he killed all four attackers and then charged in the midst of more Japanese eliminating as many as he could. He eventually fell to a Japanese grenade and was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.
 - The Japanese killed 53 American troops during this assault and wounded 119.
- Another attack of this nature occurred in the first week of April above the east boat basin, where 200 Japanese attacked an infantry command post. All were killed.
- Also during the month of April, soldiers from the 167th Regiment discovered a field hospital located 100 feet

underground, housing around 70 medical personnel. 63 of them surrendered

- During the month of April, the 167th Infantry Regiment tallied 1,602 Japanese killed and 867 captured.

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- KIA/WIA
 - U.S. Naval forces

| Unit | KIA | DOW | WIA | Total |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| V Corps | 26 | 14 | 234 | 274 |
| 3d MarDiv | 926 | 267 | 3503 | 4,696 |
| 4th MarDiv | 1,631 | 375 | 6,211 | 8,217 |
| 5th MarDiv | 1,950 | 634 | 7,341 | 9,925 |
| Marine Air and Ship Dets | 25 | 0 | 33 | 58 |
| Navy Units | 363 | 70 | 1,917 | 2,350 |
| Total Casualties | 4,921 | 1,360 | 19,239 | 25,520 |

- These numbers do not include 3 officers and 43 enlisted men still listed as missing, presumed dead, or the 46 officers and 2,602 enlisted men that suffered combat fatigue.
- Japanese
 - The Japanese figures are not exact. They had between 20,000 and 23,000 defenders on the island. By May 1945, after all of the last of the Japanese had

been killed or surrendered, only around 900 survived. More than 800 of those surrendered to the 167th Infantry Regiment (USA) between April and May, well after the VAC left the island.

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- MOHs
 - Twenty-two Marines, four Navy Corpsman, and one naval officer earned Navy Medals of Honor at Iwo Jima (27 total). Eleven Marines and two Sailors earned them posthumously.

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- Famous Participants
 - Belleau Wood Veterans
 - MGen Graves B. Erskine
 - MGen Clifton B. Cates (19th CMC)
 - MGen Keller E. Rockey
 - LtGen. Holland M. Smith

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- First Flag Raisers
 - Sgt Ernest I. “Boots” Thomas, Lt. Harold Schrier, Cpl. Chuck Lindberg, Corpsman John Bradley, Pfc. Ray Jacobs, Phil Ward, Jim Michaels, and Sgt Hank Hansen

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- Second Flag Raisers
 - Ira Hayes
 - Franklin Sousley (KIA)
 - John Bradley
 - Harlon Block (KIA)
 - Michael Strank (KIA)
 - Rene Gagnon

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- **Conclusion**
- Significance of battle to the War:
 - By taking Iwo Jima, the United States deprived Japan of a strong defensive bastion near the Home Islands.
 - It provided the American military with forward airfields that made bombing Japan much easier.
 - The U.S. presence on Iwo Jima helped neutralize other fortified Japanese islands in the Bonins.
 - Japan suffered a significant loss of morale after Iwo's fall and its loss served as a very important step toward their ultimate defeat.

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- Significance of battle to the Marine Corps

- The battle demonstrated that the Navy/Marine Corps team can succeed at their most violent and risky of missions: amphibious assault against a heavily fortified and fanatically defended enemy position.
- As a result of this success, Iwo Jima, like other battles celebrated in Marine Corps history such as Chapultepec, Belleau Wood, and Guadalcanal, retains a special place in the lore of the Corps.
- Admiral Nimitz said of the operation “Among the Americans who served on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue.”
- Joe Rosenthal’s photograph of the second flag raising has become one of the most popular and positive public images of the Marine Corps.

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