

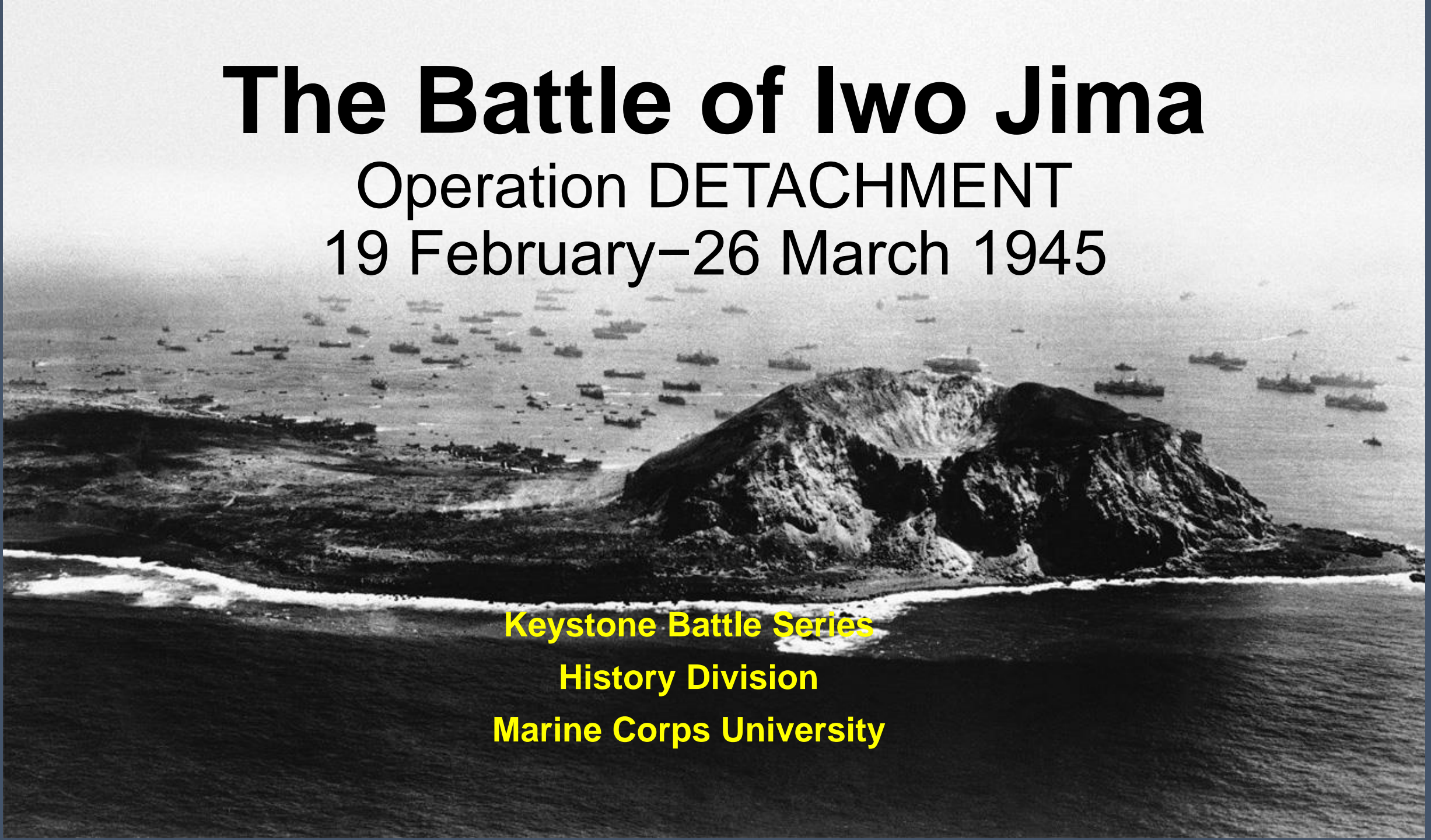
The Battle of Iwo Jima

Operation DETACHMENT
19 February–26 March 1945

Keystone Battle Series

History Division

Marine Corps University



Introduction

- The significance of the battle
- Three Marine divisions under a single tactical command
- American forces sustained more casualties than the Japanese
- Classic textbook amphibious assault
- Public relations

Mount Suribachi

A photograph of Mount Suribachi, a large, rounded, grassy hill overlooking a dark, sandy beach and the ocean. The sky is overcast. The text 'Mount Suribachi' is overlaid in yellow on the image.

Context: Time, Place and Opposing Forces



Central and Southern Pacific Drives

Grand Strategy

In 1945 the United States and her allies sought to continue the momentum gained from the successes of 1944 over Japan and Germany.



European Theater

Iwo Jima: Operation DETACHMENT



General Douglas MacArthur (left)
Admiral Chester Nimitz (right)

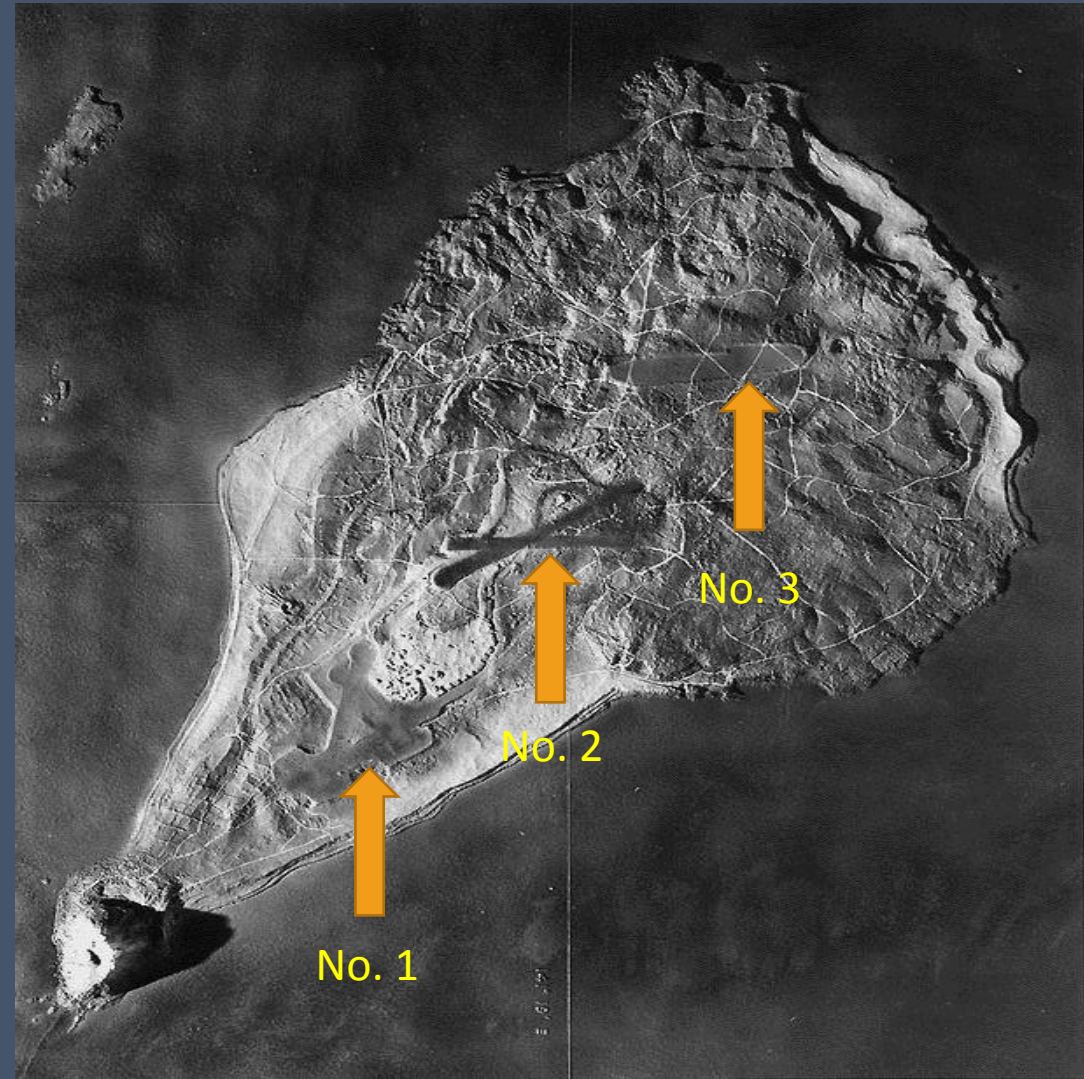


U.S. military strategists chose Iwo Jima as a target, in part, because of its proximity to the Japanese home islands

Strategic Importance of Iwo Jima to U.S. Forces



U.S. Navy wanted Iwo for land based support for bombers and escorts



Aerial Photograph of Iwo Jima shows the three air fields and Suribachi in the left-bottom of photo

American Naval Forces and Leaders



Top Left

Adm
Raymond
Spruance



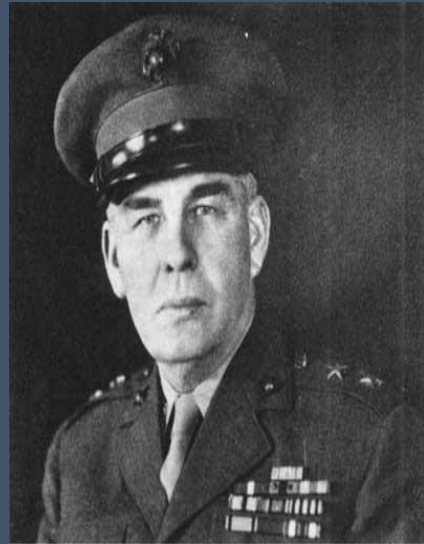
Top Right

LtGen
Holland Smith



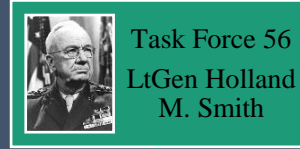
Bottom Left

Vice Adm
Kelly Turner



Bottom Right

MGen Harry
Schmidt



Task Force 56
LtGen Holland
M. Smith



V Amphibious
Corps
MajGen Harry
Schmidt



3d Marine
Division
MajGen Graves
B. Erskine



4th Marine
Division
MajGen Clifton
B. Cates



5th Marine
Division
MajGen Keller
E. Rockey



3d Marines
Col James A.
Stuart



23d Marines
Col Walter W.
Wensinger



26th Marines
Col Chester B.
Graham



9th Marines
Col Howard N.
Kenyon



24th Marines
Col Walter I.
Jordan



27th Marines
Col Thomas A.
Wornham



21st Marines
Col Hartnoll J.
Withers



25th Marines
Col John R.
Lanigan



28th Marines
Col Harry B.
Liversedge



12th Marines
LtCol Lowell E.
English
Maj George A. Percy



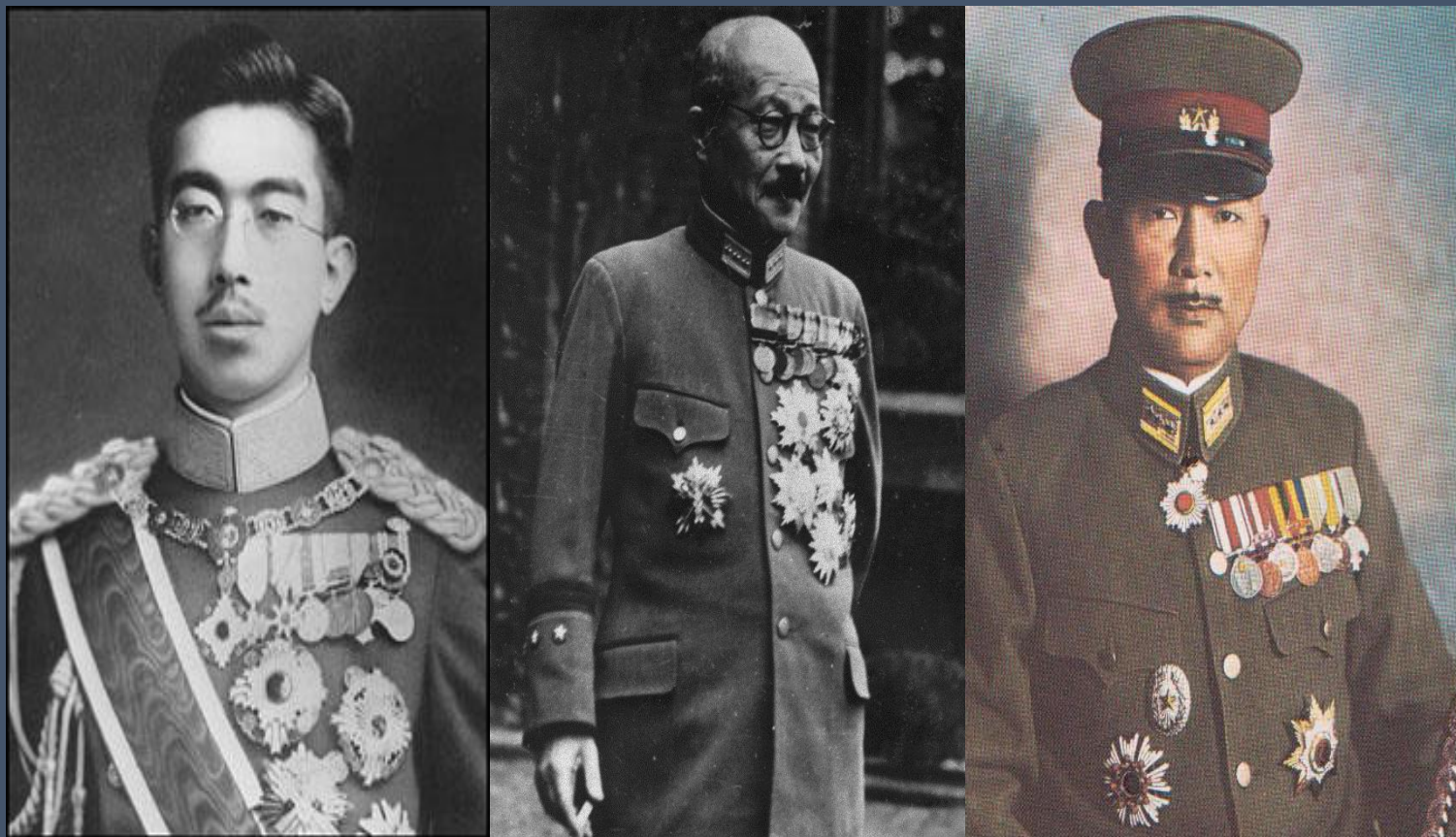
14th Marines
Col Louis G.
DeHaven



13th Marines
Col James E.
Waller

Iwo Jima and the Japanese

For the Japanese, the loss of the Marianas during the summer of 1944 greatly increased Iwo Jima's strategic and symbolic significance



Emperor Hirohito (left); Prime Minister General Hideki Tojo (center);
LtGen Tadamichi Kuribayashi (right)

U.S. Assault Plan



Veteran Marine demolition team studying Iwo before attack

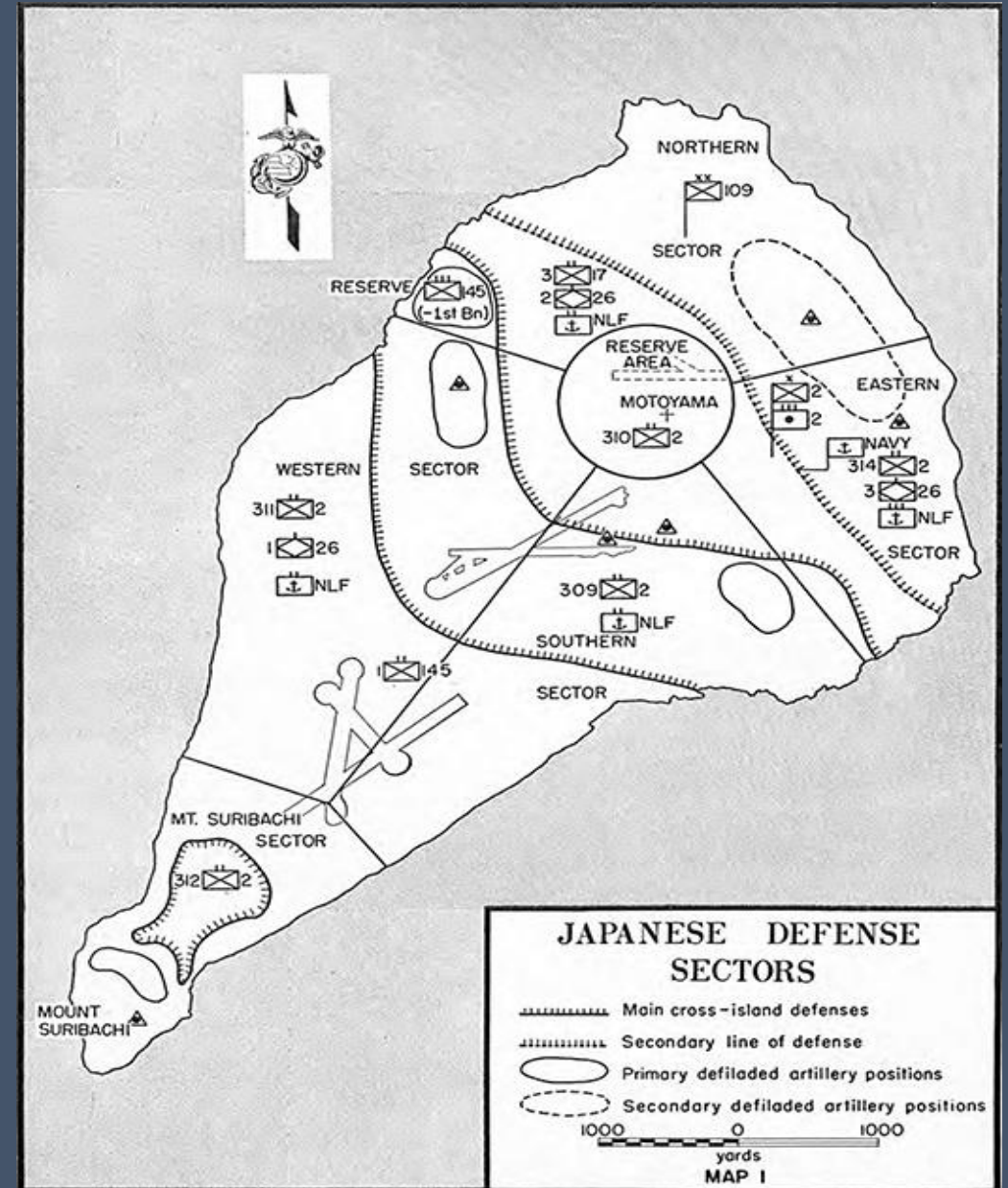


Assault Plan

Kuribayashi's Defense Plan



Kuribayashi broke with previous Japanese defense doctrine and the Marines would pay a heavy price



8 December 1944 to 15 February 1945 Bombing Campaign



The Controversial Preliminary Bombardment

Smith and Schmidt vs. Spruance and Turner

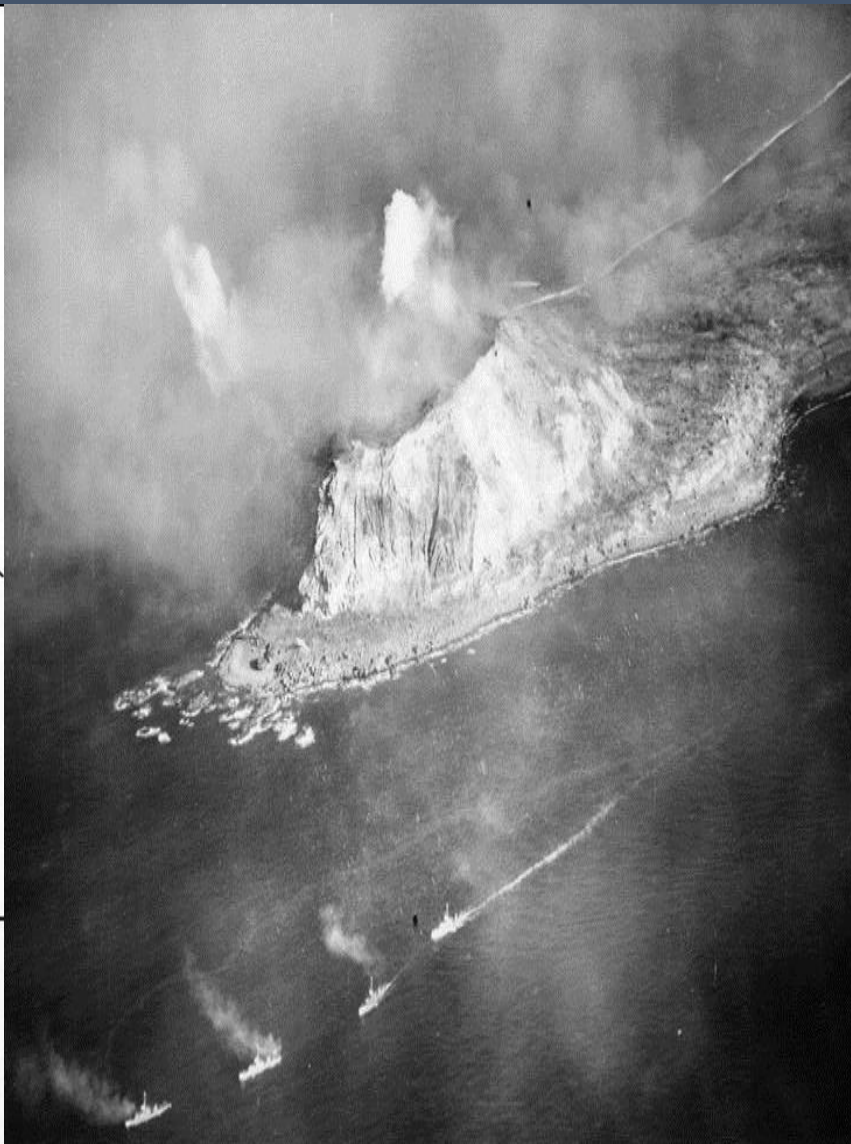
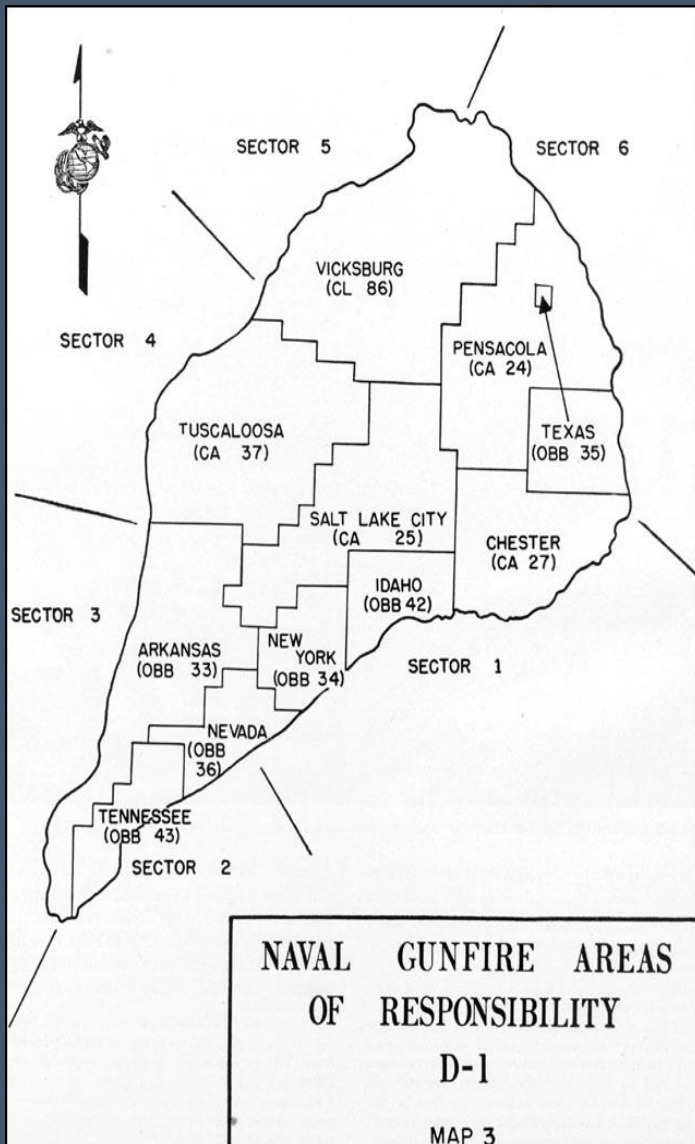


- LtGen Smith requested ten days preparatory bombardment
- Wanted D-Day dependent upon destruction of enemy positions
- Argued that a longer bombardment, prior to the landing, would reduce the loss of life and hasten the surrender of the garrison
- Focused only on Iwo and the landing



- Spruance and Turner authorized a three day bombardment
- Fixed D-Day on 19 February because the surface bombardment of Iwo had to commence with the carrier attack on Tokyo
- Thought that the prolonged aerial attacks that began on 8 December would be enough
- Naval ammunition needed to be conserved
- Took a much broader view of the operation

Preparatory Bombardment 16-19 February



- 50% of 65 coastal defense guns destroyed
- 50% of 35 heavy anti-aircraft batteries damaged or destroyed
- However, only 25% of small anti-aircraft guns, pill boxes, block houses, and covered tank/artillery positions were damaged or destroyed
- More that 80% of garrison survived unscathed
- Had enough ammunition for one more day of bombardment but concerns over the weather kept H-hour fixed at 0900, 19 February
- Smith and Schmidt would resent this for years



Marine and Navy Aviators during Surface Bombardment
Destroyed Japanese Antiaircraft Emplacement (bottom-left)

The Beach Assault on 19 February



Between 0859 and 0903 Marines from 5th and 4th Marine Divisions land under a naval rolling barrage



5th Marine Division



4th Marine Division

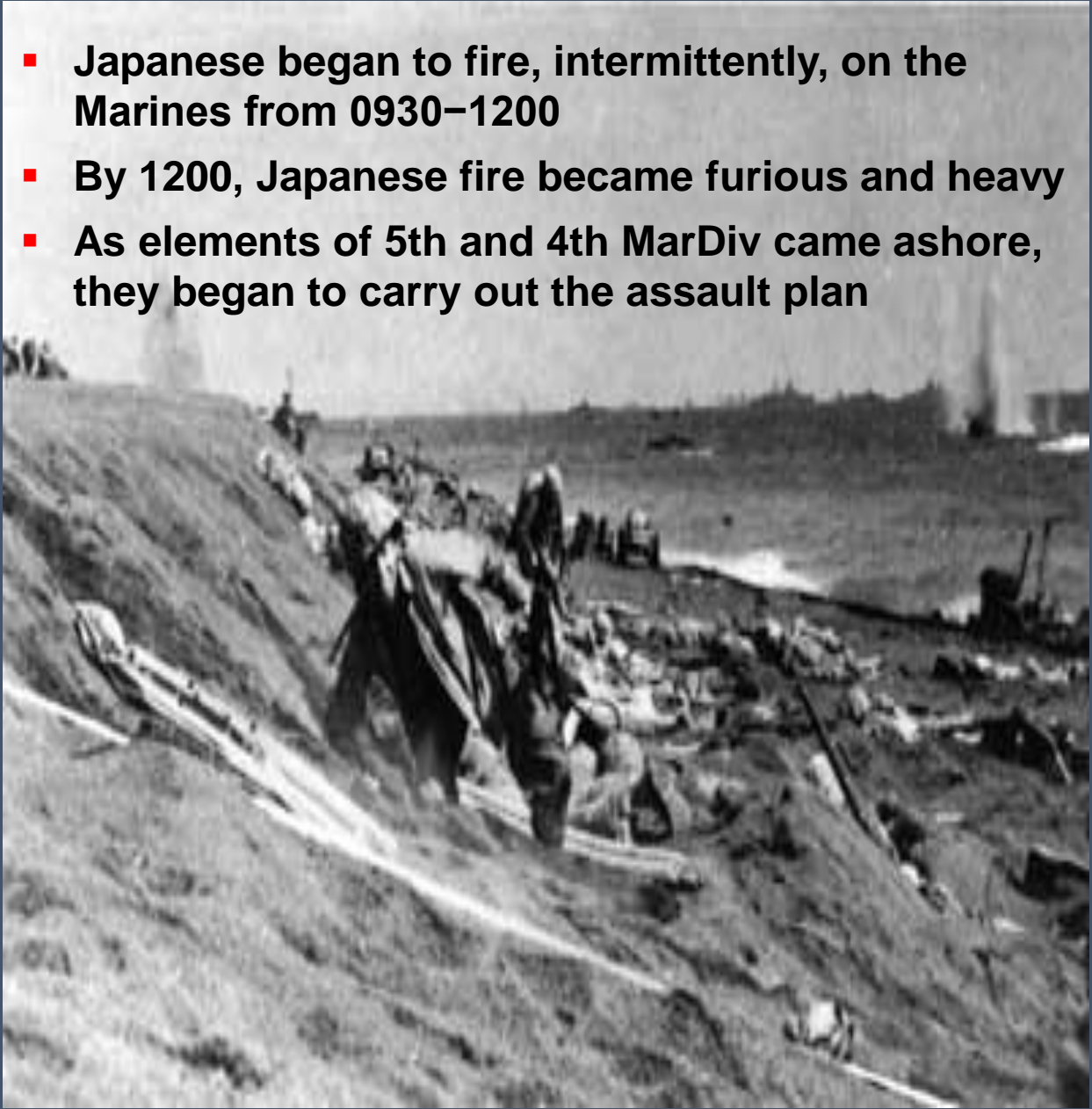


3d Marine Division
in reserve

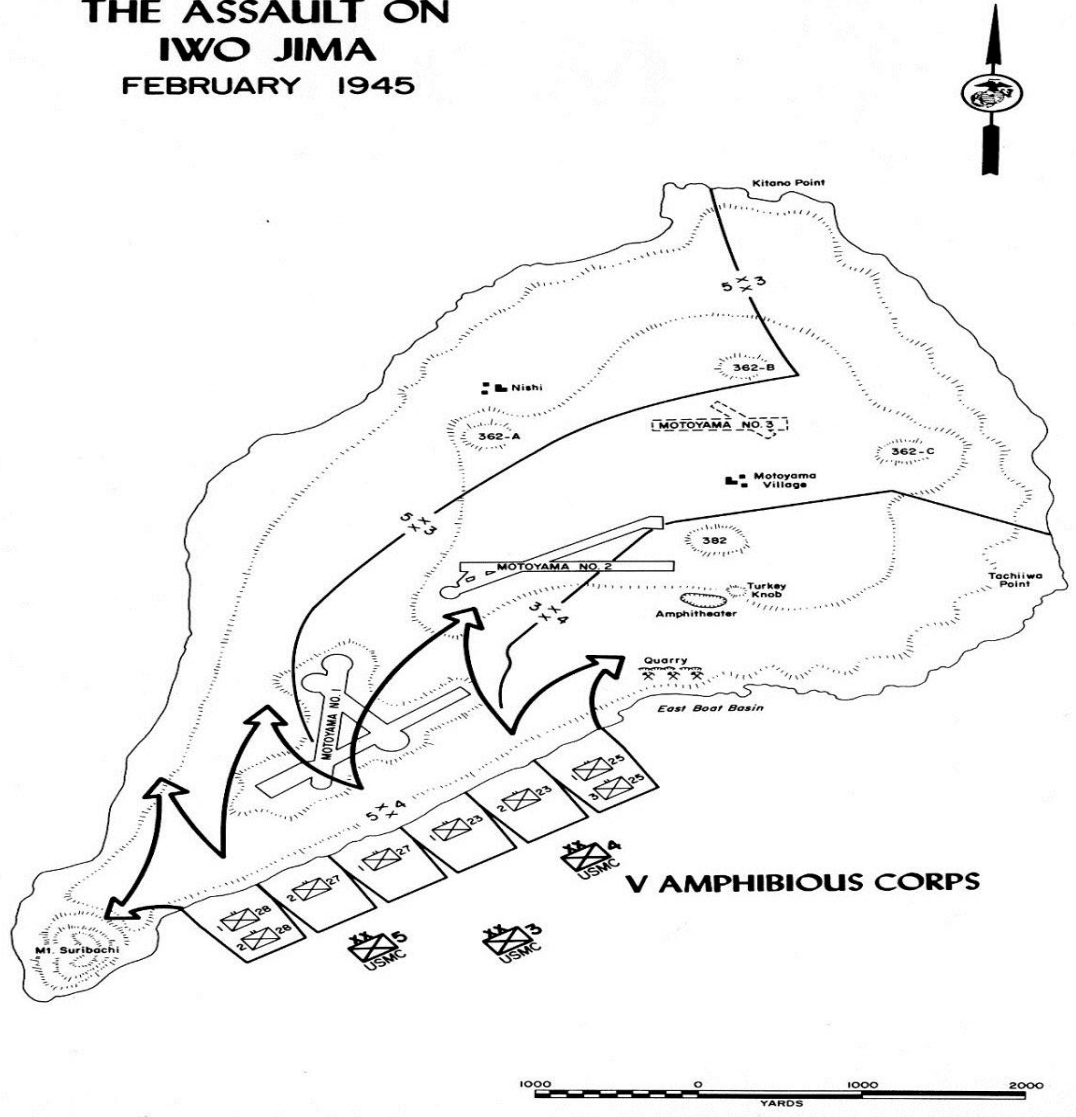
- Marines penetrated to a depth of 150 to 300 yards initially
- The Japanese waited as men, vehicles, and materiel began to concentrate on the beach



- Japanese began to fire, intermittently, on the Marines from 0930–1200
- By 1200, Japanese fire became furious and heavy
- As elements of 5th and 4th MarDiv came ashore, they began to carry out the assault plan



**THE ASSAULT ON
IWO JIMA
FEBRUARY 1945**



John Basilone



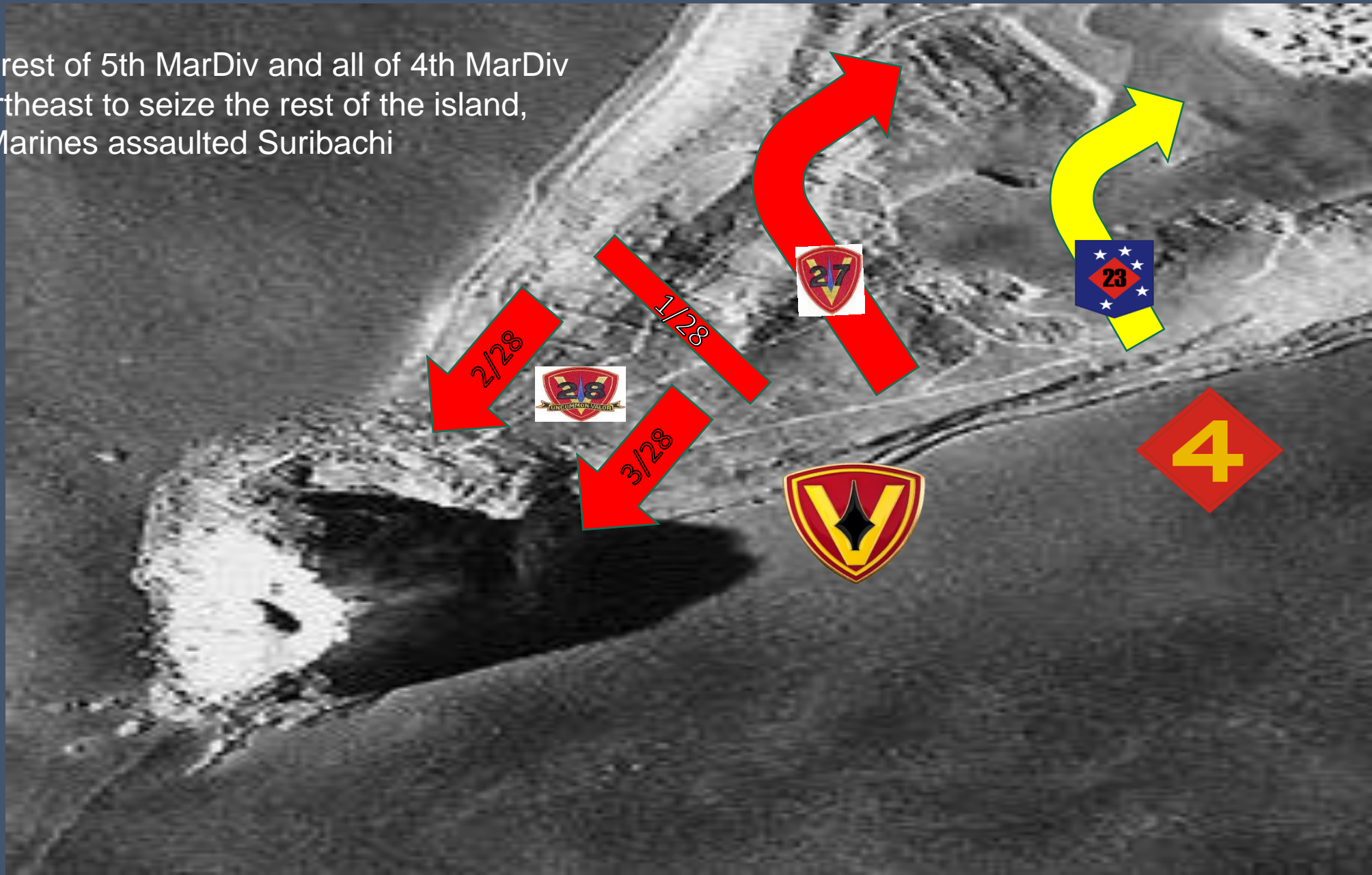
Clearing out each enemy position was tedious and usually involved coordinated use of explosives, flame throwers, and small arms fire. The process cost time and lives.



Marines approach Japanese positions and clear them out with flame and explosives

Suribachi and the 28th Marines: 20–23 February

While the rest of 5th MarDiv and all of 4th MarDiv turned northeast to seize the rest of the island, the 28th Marines assaulted Suribachi





As the 28th Marines advanced, inch by inch, yard by yard, artillery pounded the mountain.

By the end of 22 February, the fight for Suribachi was virtually over



Marines from 2/28 advance cautiously around Suribachi's rim.



Carefully rooting out resistance close to the summit, a Marine examines a wounded Japanese soldier.

Joe Rosenthal's Photo of Second Flag Raising

The first flag making its ascent with the 2/28

Feb. 23, 1946

Marines under fire carrying flag up Mt. Suribachi for first flag raising.

Joe Rosenthal



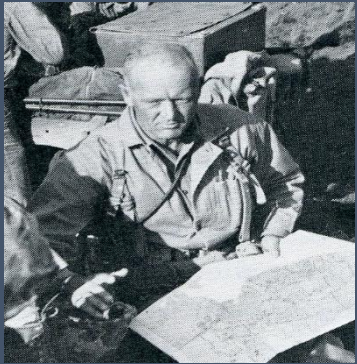
First flag raising

The Drive North

20 Feb–26 March



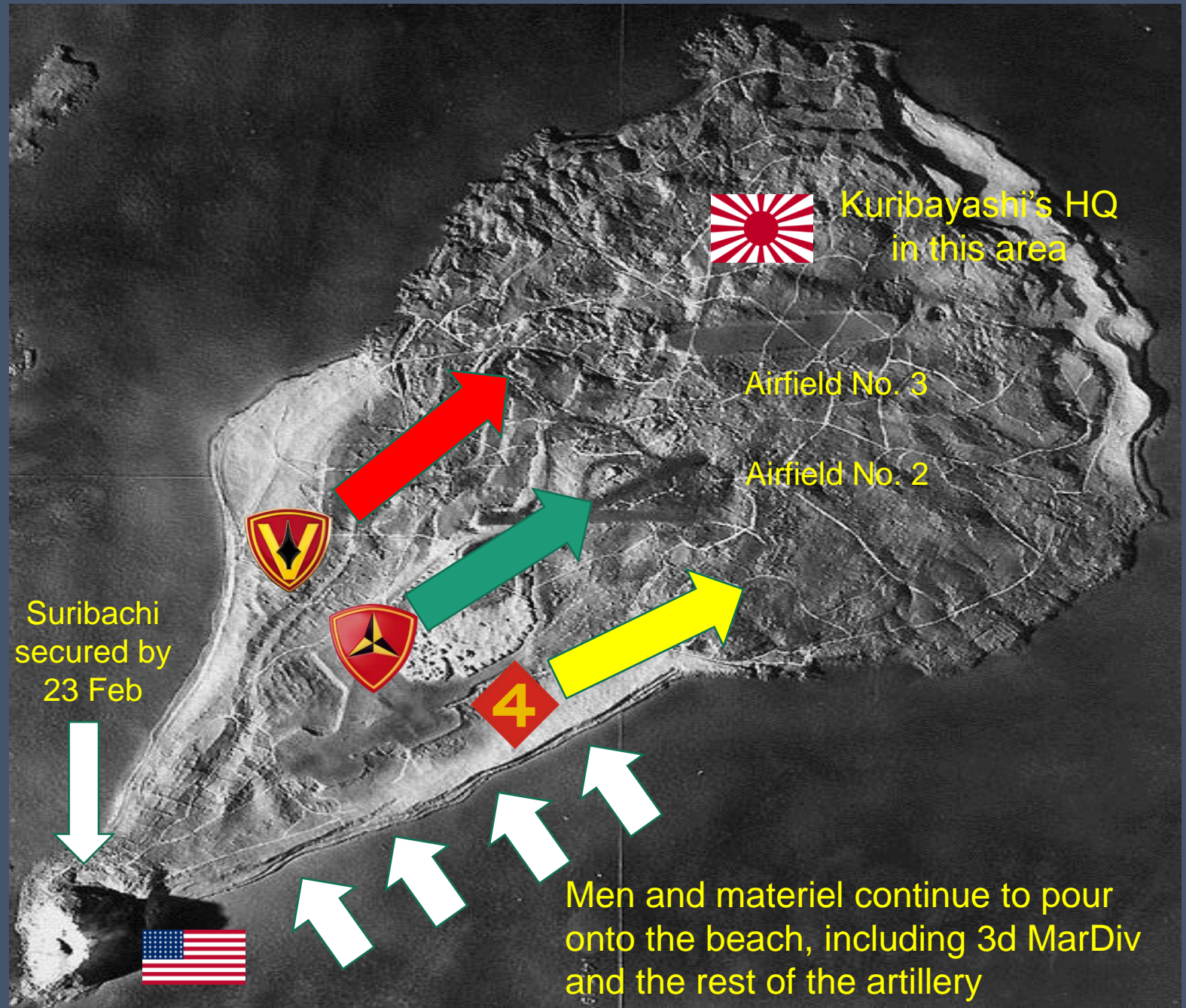
MajGen Keller Rockey,
CO 5th MarDiv



MajGen Graves Erskine,
CO 3d MarDiv



MajGen Clifford B.
Cates, CO 4th MarDiv



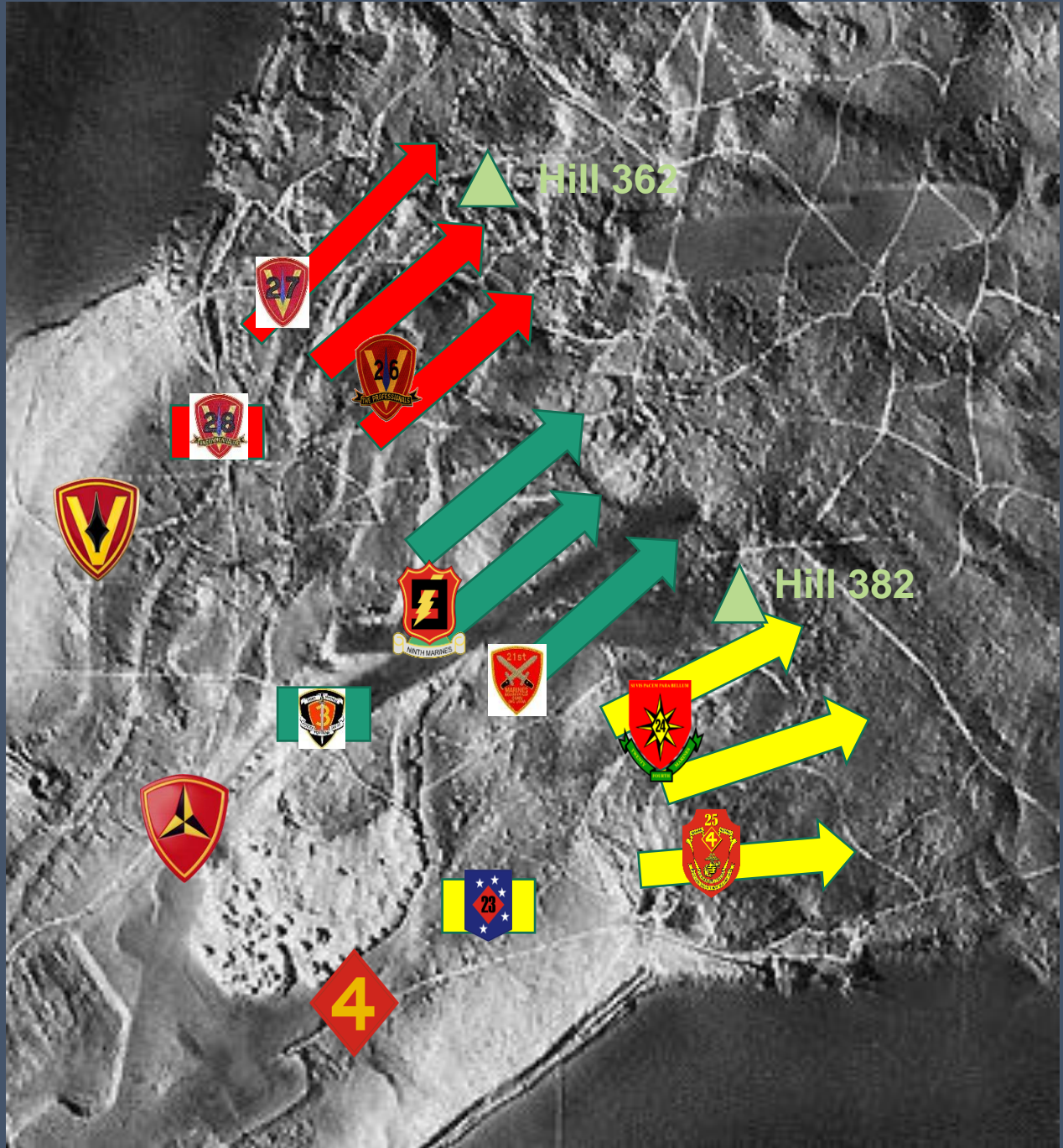
- 20–27 February saw minor gains
- After more concentrated barrage from naval guns, Marine artillery, and airstrikes, all three divisions began to advance at a steady pace by 27 February



Sgt Ross F. Gray
Posthumous MOH
21 Feb

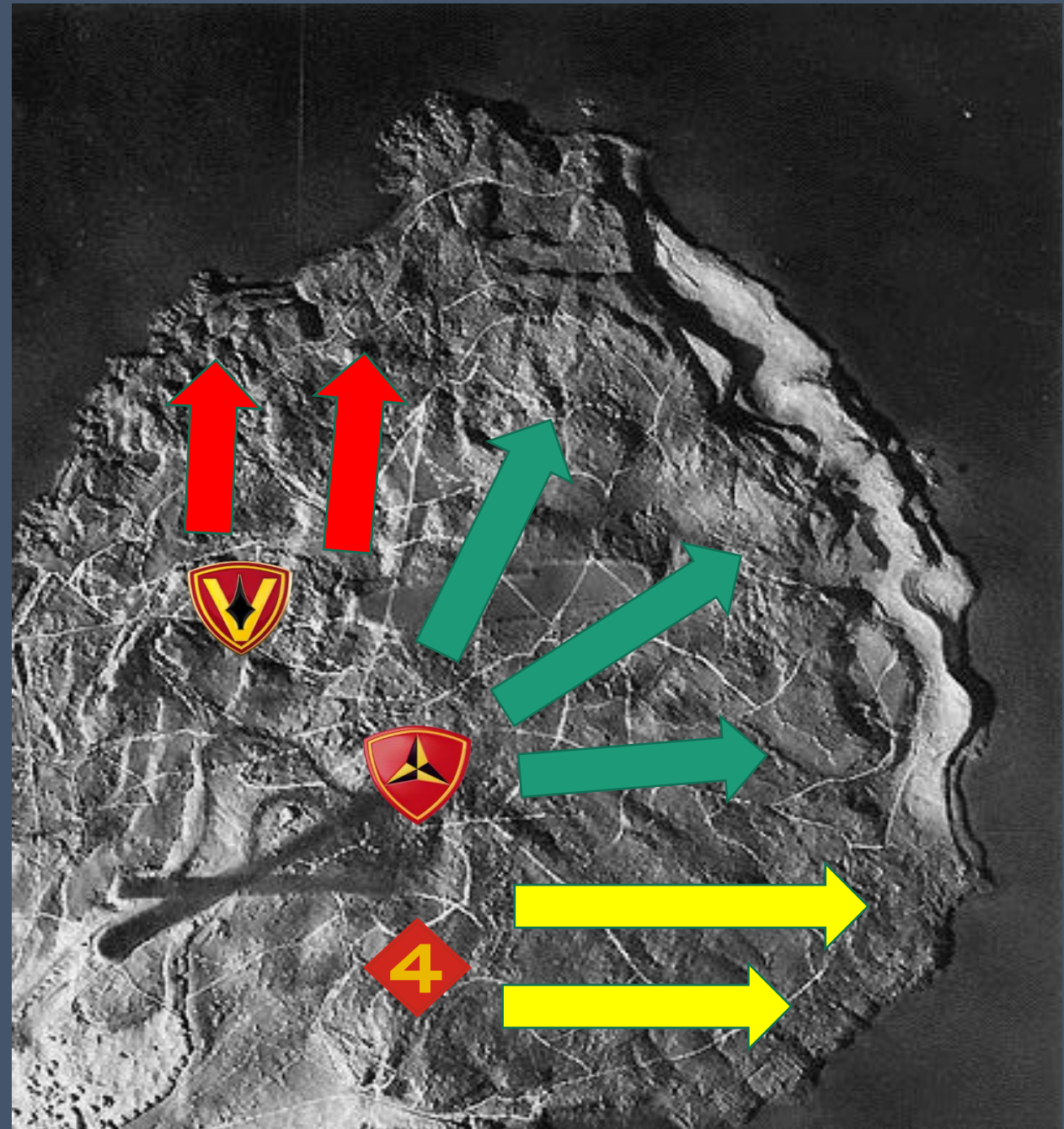


HM1 John H. Willis
Posthumous MOH
28 Feb



First Week of March

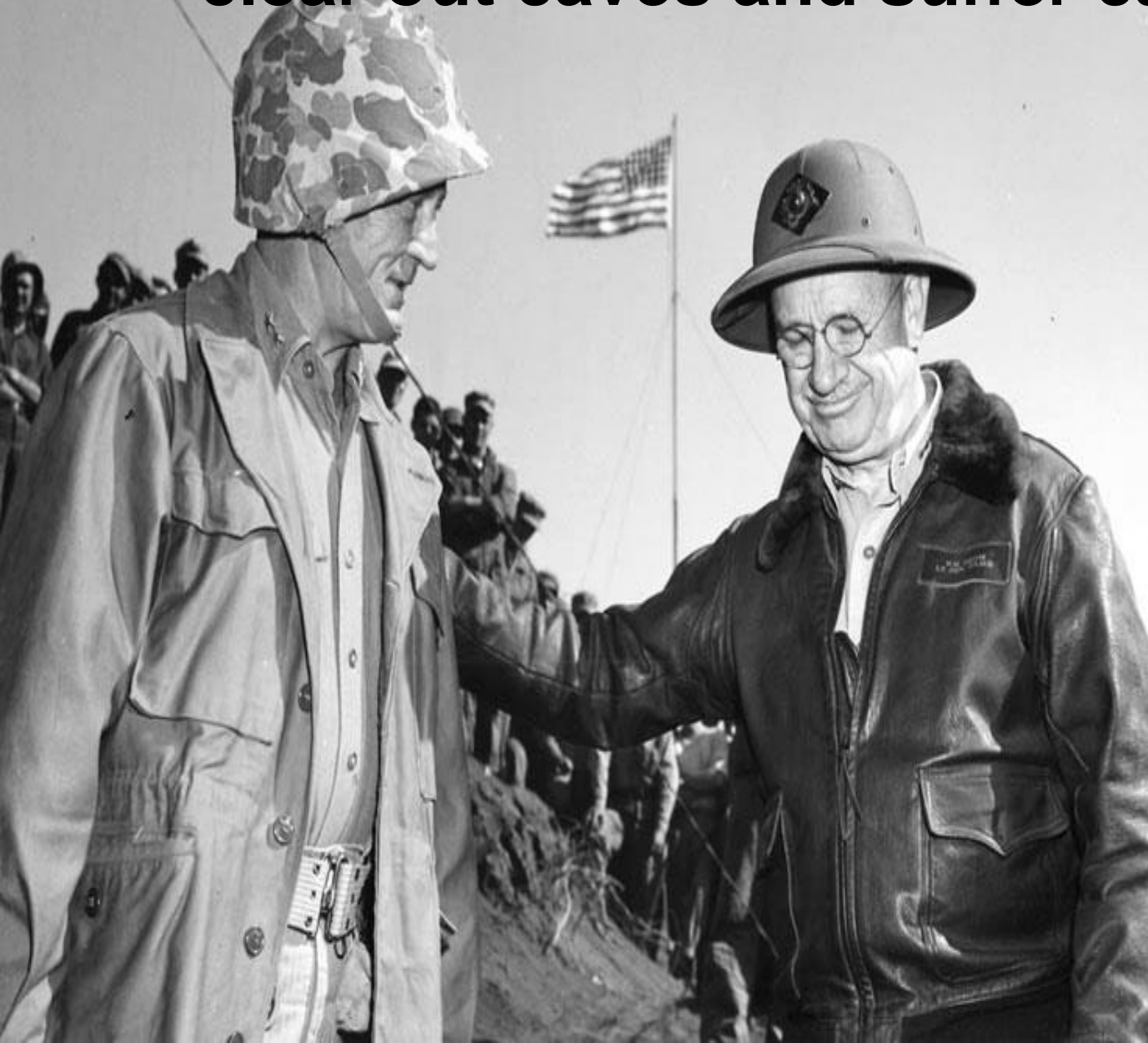
- Period of negligible gains due to fierce Japanese resistance
- 6 March saw a shift in Marine assault tactics
- By 10 March 4th MarDiv reached the coast and cut off communication between Japanese in that sector and Kuribayashi's command post



All three divisions had to fight through very tough terrain



Island declared secure on 16 March but Marines continued to clear out caves and suffer casualties until 26 March





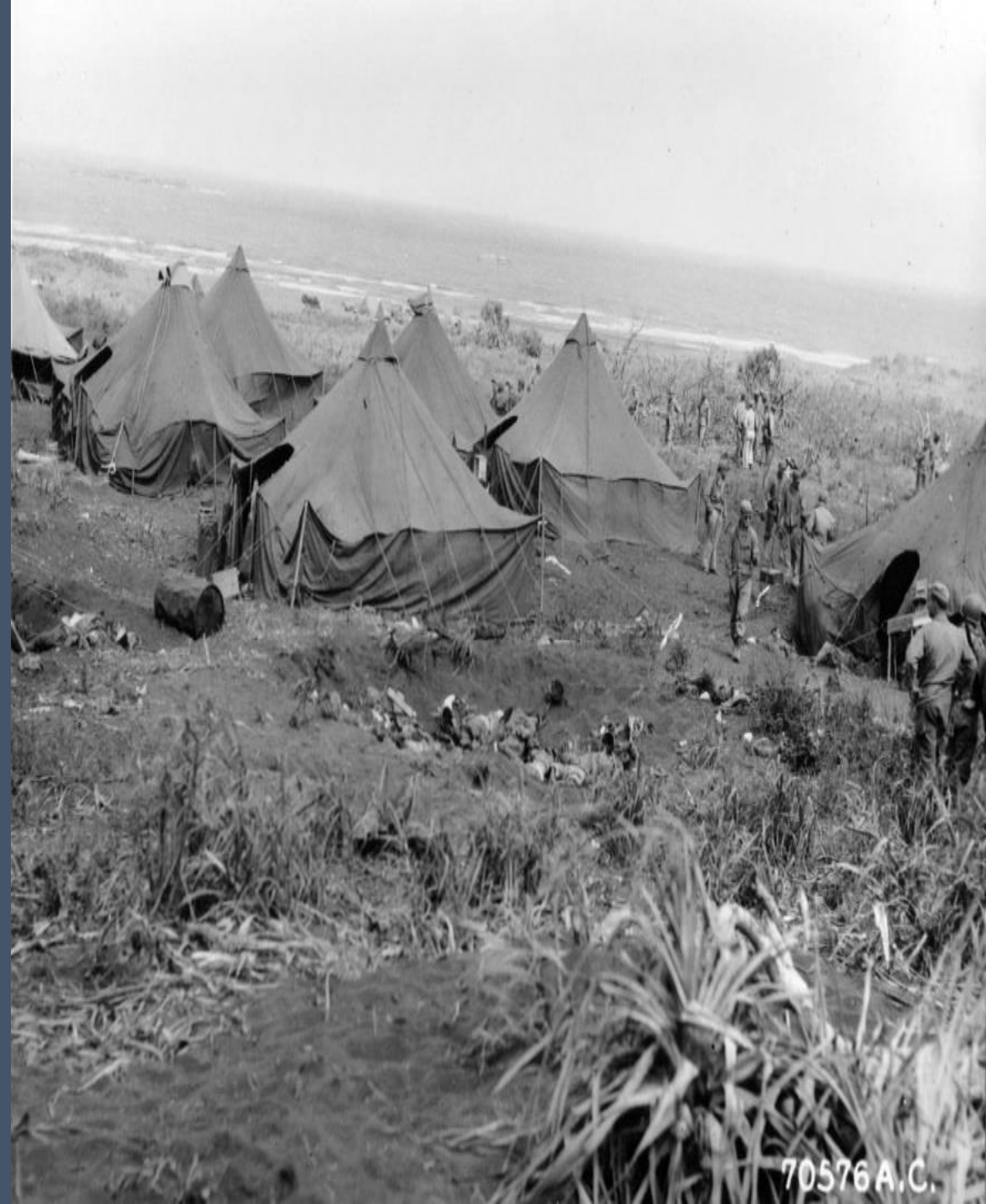
Early on 26 March, hundreds of Japanese soldiers executed a well organized attack on Marine and Army units encamped near the western beaches.

5th Pioneer Battalion, an African-American Marine unit, repulsed the attack and killed most of the Japanese.



Left
1stLt Harry Linn,
Posthumous MOH

Right
Japanese dead and
bullet ridden tents
the morning after
the Japanese
surprise attack



70576 A.C.

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

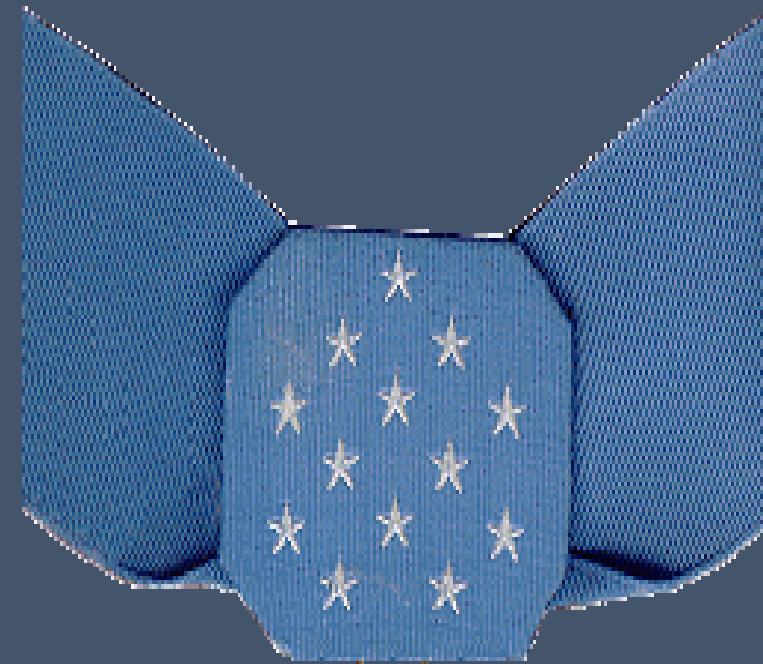


Casualties

These approximate 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.

Navy and Marine Corps Medals of Honor

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



Famous Participants

Belleau Wood to Iwo Jima



Iwo Jima

MajGen Graves B.
Erskine, CG 3d
MarDiv



Iwo Jima

MajGen Clifton B.
Cates, CG 4th
MarDiv



Iwo Jima

MajGen Keller E.
Rockey, CG 5th
MarDiv



Iwo Jima

LtGen Holland M.
Smith, Commander
ATF

Belleau Wood

Lt, 79th Co. 2/6

Belleau Wood

Lt, 96th Co. 2/6

Belleau Wood

Captain, 1/5 (XO)

Belleau Wood

Major, 4th Brigade
Adjutant

First Flag Raisers

Lt Harold Schrier

Sgt Ernest "Boots" Thomas

Sgt Hank Hansen

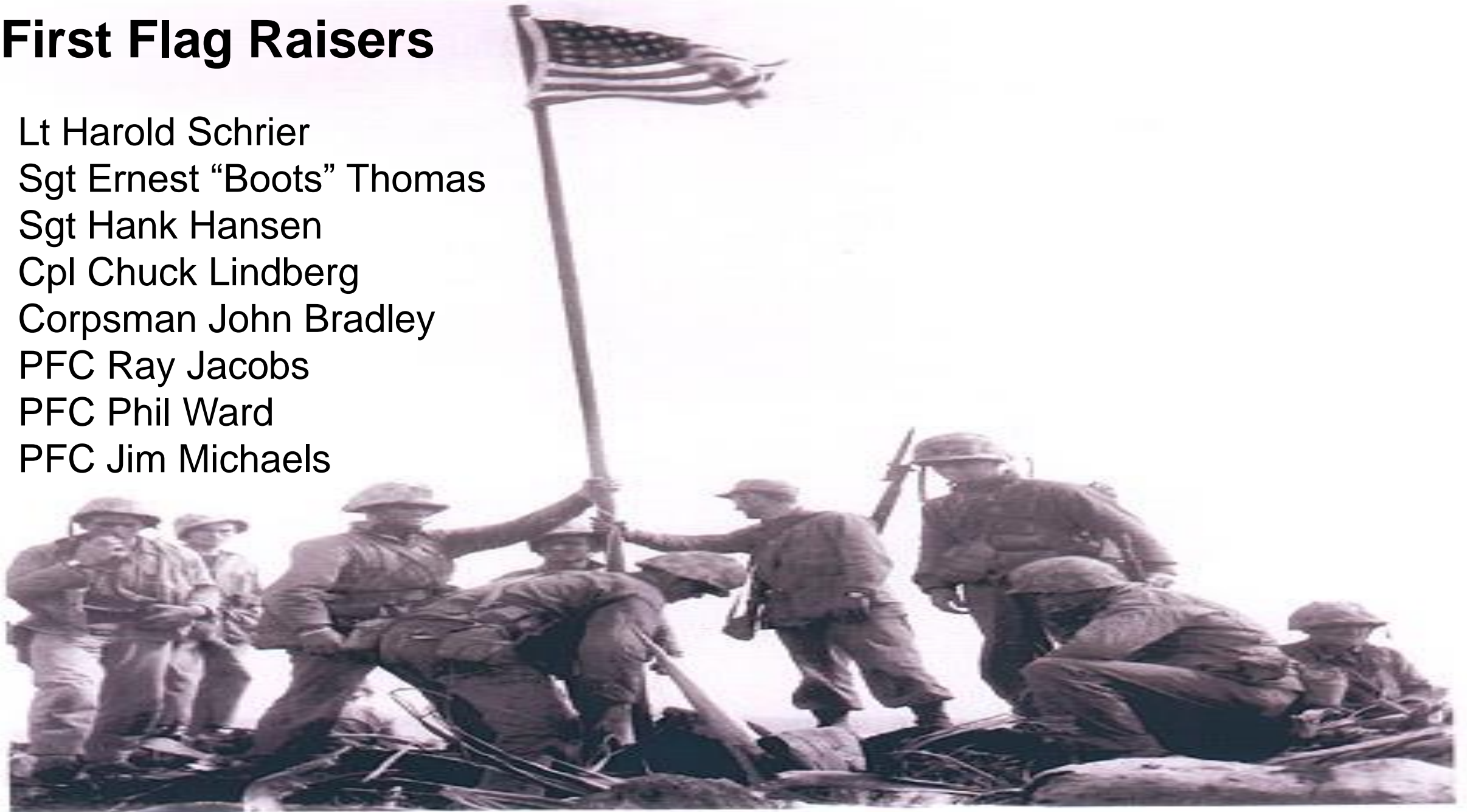
Cpl Chuck Lindberg

Corpsman John Bradley

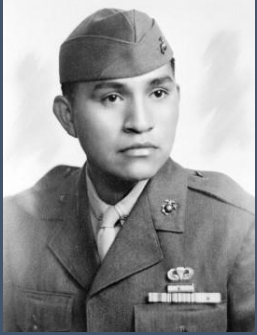
PFC Ray Jacobs

PFC Phil Ward

PFC Jim Michaels



Second Flag Raisers



Ira
Hayes

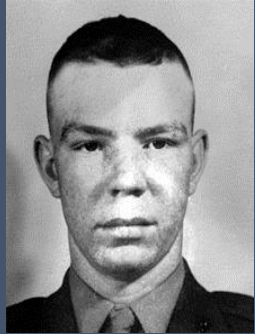


Harlon
Block

KIA

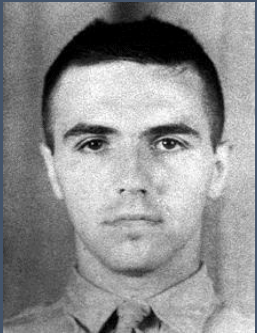


John
Bradley

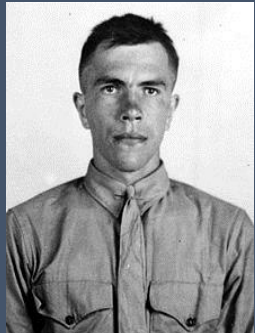


Frank
Sousley

KIA



Rene
Gagnon



Micheal
Strank

KIA



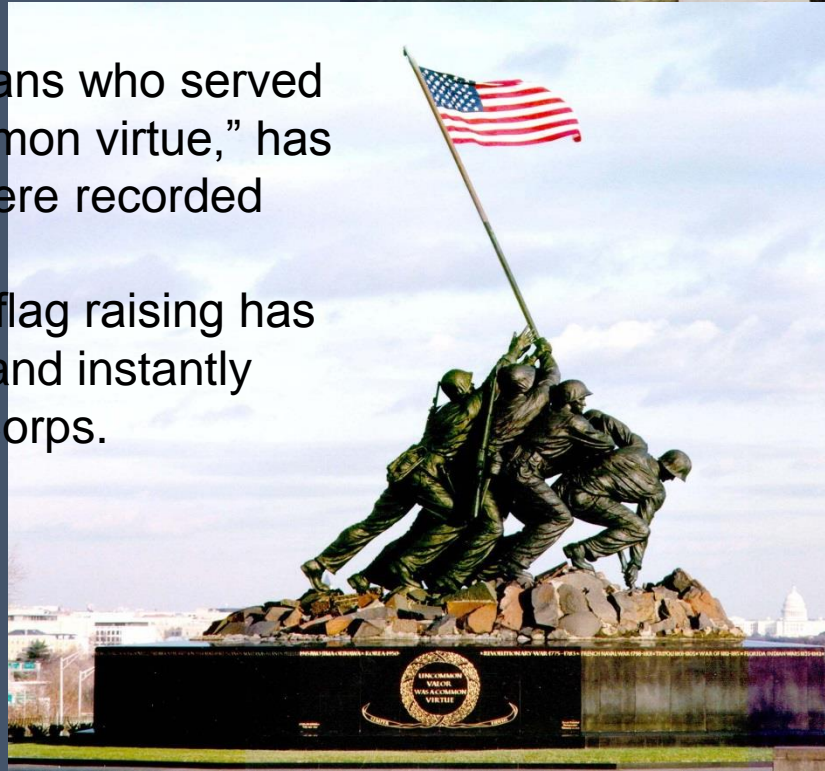
Conclusion: Significance of the Battle

- The seizure of Iwo Jima 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 was decisive in neutralizing other fortified Japanese islands in the Bonins
- The fall of Iwo served a hard blow to Japanese morale and served as a very important step toward their ultimate defeat



Significance of the Battle to the Marine Corps

- Iwo demonstrated that the Navy/Marine Corps team can succeed at their most violent and costly of missions: amphibious assault against a heavily fortified and fanatically defended enemy position
- Iwo Jima, like Chapultepec, Belleau Wood, and Guadalcanal, retains a special place in the history and lore of the Marine Corps
- Admiral Nimitz's words "Among the Americans who served on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue," has been associated with Marines since they were recorded
- Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the second flag raising has become one of the most popular, positive, and instantly recognizable public images of the Marine Corps.



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



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