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

MEDAL OF HONOR
GY SGT
US MARINE CORPS
WORLD WAR II
NOV 4 1916
FEB 19 1945
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.
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
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

Men and materiel continue to pour onto the beach, including 3d MarDiv and the rest of the artillery.
- 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>KIA</th>
<th>DOW</th>
<th>WIA</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>234</td>
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<td>3d MarDiv</td>
<td>926</td>
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<td>Navy Units</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Casualties</strong></td>
<td>4,92</td>
<td>1,36</td>
<td>19,23</td>
<td>25,52</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

**Belleau Wood**
Lt, 79th Co. 2/6

**Iwo Jima**
MajGen Clifton B. Cates, CG 4th MarDiv

**Belleau Wood**
Lt, 96th Co. 2/6

**Iwo Jima**
MajGen Keller E. Rockey, CG 5th MarDiv

**Belleau Wood**
Captain, 1/5 (XO)

**Iwo Jima**
LtGen Holland M. Smith, Commander ATF

**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
Rene Gagnon
John Bradley
Frank Sousley
Micheal Strank

KIA
KIA
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.
Mark R. Folse
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