

A BATTLE RECALLED
Memories of Black Sand, Sulfur, and a Hidden Foe

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Introduction

We are on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean seventy-five years following a battle, a battle on an island of black sand and an extinct volcano named Suribachi. Broad striped scarlet and gold canopies shield our eyes from the brilliant afternoon sun. This is Camp Pendleton, the former 132,000 acre Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores opened in 1942. Thousands of Marines and sailors who fought to take Iwo Jima trained here.

On this February afternoon a stiff wind blows off the Pacific. Nearby is the beach where generations of Marines have rehearsed amphibious landings. To the south are the long since silenced training camps Elliot, Kearney, and Matthews. Seventy miles west is San Clemente Island, the stage for additional practice landings. San Diego is home to the MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) San Diego. The depot, built on reclaimed tidal land with classic Mission Revival architecture sits in stark contrast to the humid sand flea alligator populated Parris Island, the South Carolina base for Marine Corps basic training east of the Mississippi. The rival San Diego depot is known for graduating *Hollywood Marines*. Both depots instill a culture critical to the Marine Corps' success, of Semper Fi, esprit de corps, and Ooh-rah.

Below the bluff commuters cram Interstate 5 on their daily am/pm grind. Nearby freeway exits are constant reminders of the Corps' storied history; among them Basilone Road and Vandergrift

Boulevard. Alexander Archer Vandergrift, the future Commandant of the Corps, led his Marines on Guadalcanal and Bougainville for which he received the Medal of Honor. John Basilone's heroic efforts on Guadalcanal also earned him our nation's highest award. The newly married Marine could have lived out his life in stateside comfort and safety following the fight. He chose instead to return to his fellow Marines, and to the battlefield. Gunnery Sergeant Basilone, a member of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, lost his life on D-Day, 19 February 1945.

Retired Master Gunnery Sergeant Len Maffioli steps to the lectern. Before him sit four US Marine active general officers immaculate in their Dress Blues, medals and ribbons, polished brass, and ceremonial Sam Browne belts. Two are Brigadier Generals, a third is a Major General and the fourth, is three star Lt. Gen. Joseph Osterman, at the time commanding general of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. These officers are not here to speak. Their attendance is out of respect and admiration for those who came before them. At the commemorative banquet later that evening Osterman will declare, 'those of us who serve do so on your backs and shoulders. You set the standard for us today.'

Twenty-seven other Iwo vets join Maffioli; mostly Marines, with four or five Navy and one Coast Guardsman. They are in their mid to late nineties. Some are in wheelchairs. Others steady themselves with walkers and canes. At their sides, sons, daughters, and grandchildren escort them to reserved seats. One Navy veteran wears his original "cracker jacks"; the "dixie cup" cover cocked to the side. He stands straight and tall, proud, fit. Another proud Navy veteran joins him. The multiple hash marks on the uniform of this former charro and member of the Cowboy Hall of Fame denotes his lengthy Naval service. A legendary Navajo code talker is present. He is one of few living of the 350 to 420 men who used their native language to confound the Japanese. Marine unit and *Iwo Survivor* ball caps are scattered among the attendees. Many of those present wear ties with the emblematic globe and anchor. One or two nonagenarian Marines are attired in their Blues. Blankets draped across laps ward off the afternoon chill.

A local Congressman is in attendance. Civilian and Marine Corps press, still and video cameramen, and television reporters document the event. Families of the departed are present. We were there before losing them. We continue to honor their service and sacrifice. This is a community dominated by aging baby boomers with Generation Xers, Millennials, and some Gen Z or Centennials thrown in; yet we are all connected by a common bond. Many will recite their veterans' service, units, dates, and the battles in which they fought. There is the sister who lost her older brother on Iwo, the daughter born after her father shipped out, and the elderly wife who will soon join her long departed husband on the other side. As well, there is the young boy with his great-grandfather; the family patriarch wounded on D-Day + 10, evacuated and recovered has had a full life.

Maffioli, a Bronze Star and Purple Heart recipient and veteran of the Pacific War, Korea, and Vietnam was one of a handful of POWs held by the Chinese Communist Forces who escaped captivity during the Korean War. On Iwo he was a member of the 4th Motor Transportation Battalion, 4th Marine Division. He landed on D-Day + 7. The Master Gunnery Sergeant has a confident, firm grasp on the lectern. Despite the years his voice retains a strong commanding presence. He speaks of the Quarry and Bloody Gorge, and the Meat Grinder; Hill 382, Turkey Knob, and the Amphitheater; objectives on Iwo earned at horrific deadly expense.

The fight was not against the Japanese on the island, but the Emperor's soldiers and sailors within. Hidden fortifications, 17 miles of tunnels large enough to accommodate trucks and tanks, storehouses, and hospitals, some 1500 pill boxes, caves, and a structure seven stories tall contained within Suribachi made the Japanese nearly invisible. Many would not recall ever seeing living Japanese troops during their time on the volcanic island. The former teenagers and 20 something year olds remember the battle as if yesterday. It sticks with them. They were forever changed. It never goes away. It is always there. Smells and sounds ignite indescribable memories of experiences only those who lived through it can comprehend; diesel fuel and cordite, a dead animal decaying along the roadside, 4th of July fireworks, and much more. Sometimes an unsettling dream wakes them in the

dark of night. Foes are defiant, difficult to erase.

The memorial service is brief, just thirty minutes. A pair of Marine buglers bring instruments to their lips. We hear the haunting 24 notes of Taps; the second field musician echoing the lead. Marines in uniform stand at rigid attention, their arms firmly at their sides with fists at right angle to the scarlet blood-red pant stripe. The rest of us stand with right hands over our hearts. The concluding C note fades away in a decrescendo. The calmed silence is interrupted by the firing of a 105 mm howitzer. Sergeant Maffioli quickly breaks in, apologizing to his audience for not warning us of the impending twenty-one gun salute, now twenty. Young Marines, Marine officers, and family then gather around for photos with the survivors of a battle that remains a touchstone in our nation's history.

This is the last time following nearly 40 consecutive years for family and friends to assemble at Camp Pendleton to honor, to remember, to salute their Iwo Jima veterans. With the exception of Maffioli, the Iwo Marines who established this event are no longer among us. Those who took up the mantel in their absence chose the seventy-fifth anniversary as the appropriate conclusion to this time honored tradition.

Memorials observing the sacrifice, duty, and service on Iwo will carry on in some form or manner in other localities. On the east coast the Iwo Jima Association of America plans to continue hosting memorial events. Hartford County, Connecticut is home to the Iwo Jima Survivors Association and the National Iwo Jima Memorial Monument honoring those killed on Iwo, including 100 Connecticut sons. Along the gulf coast of Texas near South Padre Island stands Felix de Weldon's original mold for the Arlington, Virginia memorial.

Iwo Jima

On the 23rd of February 1945 Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal captured arguably the most iconic image of the 20th century; six men raising our Nation's flag over Mt. Suribachi. The image

of the Stars and Stripes secured to a salvaged piece of cistern pipe is seared into our memory. It remains a symbol of victory, sacrifice, hope. The design of the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Virginia is a “visual allusion” of the flag raising.

This defining moment on D-Day + 4 came near the beginning of the epic 36 day battle. Days of terror and fear, of heartache and carnage remained before the effort to take Iwo Jima was deemed complete. Nearly 100,000, including an estimated 21,000 to 23,000 Japanese troops, fought to capture or defend Iwo Jima. One third of all U.S. troops were either killed or wounded. Six thousand eight hundred and twenty-one (6,821) Americans died. ¹ One third of Marines killed in World War II died on Iwo. Less than 300 Japanese survived. Others say it was slightly more than 1,000. ² Of the 473 Medal of Honor recipients in World War II, 27 were awarded for actions on Iwo; twelve posthumously and four of the 27 presented to Navy Corpsmen.

Why does the Battle of Iwo Jima remain so vivid, so indelible among so many WW II battles? With the exception of D-Day , June 6, 1944 and the establishment of what was originally the D-Day Museum in New Orleans (since 2006, The National World War II Museum), there doesn't appear to be or was not outside the military units or veteran associations, a large effort to create organizations such as the Iwo Jima Association of America or similar entities. The New York Times #1 selling book *Flag of Our Fathers* released in 2000 and the subsequent Clint Eastwood movies renewed and heightened interest in Iwo Jima following the battle's 50th anniversary. More recent projects, including *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Dunkirk*, and *Midway* brought deserved attention to other battles. Iwo remains part of our Nation's soul. It is a sacred site, a tomb and shrine. Memorials to both sides are located on Mt. Suribachi. Was it the number of casualties? Four out of five were either killed or wounded on Iwo. And then, there were the hidden fortifications and the iconic flag raising.

¹ The Battle for Iwo Jima, National World War II Museum
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/iwo-jima-fact-sheet.pdf>

² Eric Hammel, *Iwo Jima* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 235.

A Larger Military

The Marines of the American Expeditionary Force totaled little more than 31,000 with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. By 1931 the number was nearly half that. Eight years later President Franklin Roosevelt declared a “limited national emergency” within days of Germany’s September 1, 1939 invasion of Poland. The Marines added 7,000 to their ranks, including my father. Despite the proclamation and the increase in enlistments, conscription was proposed as voluntary enlistments were considered inadequate. In September 1940 Roosevelt signed into law the *Selective Training & Service Act* despite vocal opposition. Men ages 21 to 45 were required to register for a yearly draft. By June 1941 the Marines totaled 54,359 (3,339 officers and 51,020 enlisted men).³ And then, December 7, 1941; our nation was at war. Sidewalks fronting armed forces recruiting stations were crowded with men eager to volunteer. Until early 1943, nearly all Marines were in fact, volunteers. Four years later, in June 1944 and eight months before the invasion of Iwo Jima, the Marine Corps total force numbered 475,604, an 89% increase since 1941.⁴

As with all services, Marines are required to go through basic training. Marine boot camp takes on mythical, legendary proportions. The recruits learn the traditions, the courtesy, and the discipline. The purpose of boot camp is to strip away the individual in order to function as an unit, tearing you down and building you back up. Or, as one author reported, his hair was shorn as well as his individuality.⁵ It is daunting experience; drill instructors in your face are central to the Corps’ success. Your survival depends upon it. You become a Marine, not simply join. Author and former Marine Bill Ross in his book, *Iwo Jima Legacy of Valor* wrote, recruits “learned it in an atmosphere of constant apprehension and fear, of constant challenge to physical capabilities and mental stress.”⁶ Veteran William T. Wood recalled,

³ Chronologies - WWII Campaign Chronologies of the United States Marine Corps – Selected World War II Marine Corps Chronology 1941 – 1946. Marine Corps University. <https://www.usmcm.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Research-Tools-Facts-and-Figures/Chronologies-of-the-Marine-Corps/World-War-II-1941-1945/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ McMillan, George, C. Peter Zurliden, Jr., Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., David Dempsey, Keyes Beech, & Herman Kogan, *Uncommon Valor Marine Divisions in Action* (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1986.), 16.

⁶ Bill Ross, *Iwo Jima - Legacy of Valor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 194.

They're pretty rough on you, but you learn - you learn to be a Marine. You learn to work together, and Marines never let their buddies down. You look behind all the Marines that came before you and the sacrifices they made, and it gives you a lot of pride to belong to such an outfit.⁷

The Decision

As the war progressed, military leaders in the Pacific were challenged by the 'European first' policy. The effort required to defeat the Nazis overshadowed the war against Japan. The commanders in the Pacific, including General Douglas MacArthur, Admirals Nimitz, Halsey, Spruance, and Turner, Marine General "Howlin' Mad" Smith, and others persevered in spite of divisive disagreements. Army Air Corps General Curtis LeMay of the 21st Bomber Command utilized the newly introduced B-29 Superfortresses to bomb Japan. It was a 14-hour round trip from the Marianas. US fighters lacked the fuel capacity to escort the B-29s. The bombers were isolated and alone. Their flight path crossed near Iwo Jima with radar station, two airfields, and a third under construction. Crews on the return flight low on fuel or damaged had no option other than ditching into the Pacific, hopeful for a rescue at sea. In October 1944 *Operation Detachment* was given the green light. The objective, Iwo Jima; large enough to land the Superfortresses. Iwo was and is not a lush, south sea tropical jungle island akin to Guadalcanal or Bougainville with palm trees swaying in the ocean breezes. Near the 25th parallel (north) and 2,756 miles north of the equator, it is a volcanic relic that continues to spew out sulfur impregnated steam. Hot in the daytime and bone chilling at night, the island has the appearance of an overcooked pork chop. There is no source of fresh water. Rain turns the ashen sand into a "quagmire of mushy goo."⁸

Japanese Preparations

Lt. General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, a former cavalryman and a 5th generation Samurai arrived on Iwo Jima in June 1944. He was a formidable, innovative opponent who took full advantage of the island's terrain. The General ordered a labyrinth of additional underground fortifications with masked gun

⁷ <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.79453/transcript?ID=mv0001> Interview with William T. Wood (12/2/2005), Veterans History Project, The Library of Congress, American Folklife Center

⁸ Ross, 223.

positions, interlocking, preregistered fields of fire, and automatic weapons or as one author noted, “. . . Iwo was as thick with guns as a porcupine with quills.”⁹ The rock was comparatively easy to dig and carve, the conditions in which to do so nearly unbearable. Smokeless powder would make it difficult to ascertain snipers' embedded positions. Caves and pillboxes with three foot steel reinforced concrete walls equipped with ventilation tubes had multiple camouflaged outlets. Other fortifications boasted 10 foot concrete roofs and five foot thick walls. Telephone lines ran protected underground. Kuribayashi's men buried tanks up to the turrets. Landmines liberally scattered guarded the paths most likely crossed by advancing Marines. The General conceded the Americans would make an amphibious landing along the east beaches. It would be a battle of attrition. Each member of the Japanese force was ordered to kill ten Marines before facing their own death.

American troops were familiar with the suicidal banzai attacks. Members of the 2nd and 4th Divisions faced this fanatical tactic eight months prior on Saipan; others on Guam and the 1st Marine Division encountered the infamous charges on Guadalcanal. Often in the middle of the night desperate men frequently fortified with alcohol rushed toward the American lines; their intent to do as much damage as possible. The Marines on Iwo expected the same, but were caught unaware. Kuribayashi issued orders against the large-scale, wasteful futile attacks. For the most part the Japanese troops obeyed.

The estimated 1,000 civilians, including families living on the island in 1943, carved out a subsistence existence raising sugarcane. They had a mill as well as a sulfur refinery and vegetable gardens. In anticipation of an invasion the civilian population was evacuated off the island in 1944. Among them were the subjugated comfort women. Kuribayashi issued orders prohibiting the use of alcohol. Fortification of the island was, for the most part, completed days before the invasion despite the constant aerial bombing and naval fire beginning in December. There were other formidable obstacles; not man made, but nature's obstacles; black sand or more precise, volcanic ash, and the volcanic rock and steam.

⁹ McMillan, George, *ibid*, 165.

The United States Prepares

Repeated aerial photography was unable to detect the underground fortifications. As D-Day of *Operation Detachment* approached Marine Generals Holland Smith and Harry Schmidt requested ten days of intense naval shelling and bombardment prior to the invasion. The Navy refused. Instead, they were given three days. In actuality it was three partial days due to the unfavorable weather conditions. General Kuribayashi's fortifications were not substantially damaged or repairs were made despite the estimated 6,800 tons of bombs and 22,000 naval shells thrown at the island during the 72 days prior to February 19, 1945. Volume did not equal effectiveness.

The V Amphibious Corps, the largest force of Marines ever committed to a single battle, was commanded by General Schmidt. Seventy-four thousand made up of the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions with the 3rd in reserve. They were prepared for battle. Approximately 50% had combat experience. Commanders were battle tested. Many assumed the mission would be completed in three to five days.

The 4th Division left San Diego on January 13, 1944 following several months of training at Camp Pendleton. They were the first U.S. combat group to sail from the continental United States directly to a combat engagement. Forty-five hundred miles later they landed on a small atoll in the Marshall Islands named Roi-Namur. Following a quick fight they headed to Hawaii to a newly established training camp on Maui, at the foot of the 10,000 foot extinct volcano Haleakala (“hah-le-ah-kah-lah”) Although termed a “rest camp,” there was little rest. As one veteran recalled, they trained “with mud up to their ankles.”¹⁰ There were recreational facilities, including baseball diamonds (the 4th Division's 23rd regiment had a champion baseball team), boxing rings, and later, a USO Club. Movies were shown in the out of doors with the Marines sitting on sandbags, sometimes in the pouring rain. Daily rainstorms were the norm. Less than six months later they were again at sea. This time bound for the

¹⁰ Marion Timothy Spiller, *One Marine's Story – From Teenager to Seasoned Veteran*. (Redlands: Self Published, 2008), 77.

Marianas; to Saipan and Tinian. Upon their return they received a heroes' welcome from the Maui islanders. Training intensified. Forced marches, jungle training, repetitive firing range practice, grenade and demolition rehearsals, and landing drills continued. After the first of the year the 4th boarded transports taking them to an unknown destination and unknown fate. They went to Pearl, then Entiwok and on to Saipan and Tinian where with the 3rd and 5th Divisions they had a final run through.

The 5th Division was officially activated at Camp Pendleton on 21 January 1944, about a week following the 4th Division's departure for Roi-Namur. Seasoned veterans, some from the Raider Training Battalion and the 1st Marine Parachute Regiment, made up about 40% of the division's forces. The other 60% were, for the most part, fresh out of boot camp. They boarded ships in San Diego in the Fall of 1944. There was advanced training at Camp Tawara on the Big Island.

The 3rd Division was activated at Camp Elliot on 16 September 1942. Eleven months later they landed on Guadalcanal where they trained for the invasion of Bougainville. After the invasion they were held in reserve for the June 1944 Saipan operation and then, assigned to the force invading Guam. The 3rd Division was again placed in reserve for the Iwo invasion. Two of the division's three regiments didn't wait long to get into the fight. The 21st landed on February 21 and the 9th three days later.

A contingent of nearly 500 ships massed near Iwo Jima for the invasion. Veterans of Normandy and salvaged Pearl Harbor survivors were on hand along with newly commissioned vessels. Overall, there were in actuality nearly 800 ships and 250,000 personnel involved in the overall operation. Carriers and battleships, tugs, Victory ships, cruisers and destroyers, mine layers, hospital ships, and one lone submarine were part of the armada nearly 70 miles in length steaming toward Iwo Jima. Redlands High School graduate Ensign Wayland Reynolds was aboard the USS *Missoula*, one of 52 attack transports. Also on board were the members of Easy Company, 28th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division who would conquer Mt. Suribachi on D-Day + 4.

Transports were crowded with men and equipment. Archival photographs show decks stacked with supplies and materials. Ships were virtual A to Z storehouses of goods and equipment: bulldozers, heavy cranes, road scrapers and rollers, air compressors and jackhammers, trucks, earth movers, and asphalt and concrete mixers, Quonset huts, lumber and nails, nuts and bolts, roofing materials, and electrical generators, welding equipment, and mobile machine shops. The list continued with paper and pencils, blood plasma, splints, and bandages, matches, maps, bullets, and batteries, Holy Water, fingerprint ink, and crosses, shoe laces, spark plugs, and dog food, welding rods, flashlights, and flares, garbage cans, carbon paper, and house paint, blankets, light bulbs, toilet paper, and socks, duplicating machines and movie projectors, and some 100 million cigarettes, the latter for just the 5th Division.¹¹ Men who never smoked before and would not smoke ever again found comfort and relief lighting up amid the malodorous smells.

Living arrangements aboard the ships were less than ideal. The number of racks stacked on top of each other varied; five was the norm, but there could be as many as sixteen. Turning over in the middle of the night, problematic. Others managed to find space on deck for folding cots. The Marines slept with their rifles and packs. The value of the rifle is entrenched into Marine culture. Each Marine is a rifleman by definition and training. They hold fast to a creed that reads in part,

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. . . My rifle is human, even as I am human, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories, its sights and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.¹²

Life aboard the ships was often boredom interspersed with waiting half the time in line for chow. Sitting to eat was a luxury. Members of the 4th and 5th Divisions were at sea for nearly 40 days before landing on Iwo. Salt water showers were the norm. The Office of the Quartermaster Corps issued four-

¹¹ Martha McCullen & Ronald J. Drez, *Unknown Valor: A Story of Family, Courage, and Sacrifice from Pearl Harbor to Iwo Jima*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), 216.

¹² Marine's Rifle Creed, *My Rifle – The Creed of a United States Marine*, Marine Corps University.

ounce Manhattan Soap Company manufactured bars of soap for use with the salt water. Most would not have a fresh water shower until returning to the rest camps. Continual cleaning of weapons, sharpening knife blades, and other preparatory tasks were repeated again and again. The men got exercise whenever and wherever they could. They read through well-worn paperbacks, played cards, and corresponded with their best girls, family, and friends. The men made sure their life insurance policies were up to date. Marine and Navy bands provided entertainment with the latest Glenn Miller and other big band music. And, they sought solace and reassurance attending daily Bible studies and religious services, and receiving holy communion and making confession.

Few Marines, sailors, Seabees, soldiers, and Army Air Corps pilots who fought for the eight square mile island had ever heard of Iwo Jima. As they got closer to their objective, officers and non-commissioned officers unsealed operational orders, rolled out the maps, charts, and three dimensional rubber maps. The men assembled in groups to receive instructions. A two mile stretch of black sand on the east side of the island was deemed the logical choice for an amphibious landing. The landing beaches were designated by color from left to right: green, red, yellow, and blue. The 5th Division would take the left, the closest to Mt. Suribachi; the 4th the right. The latter's initial objective was Motoyama #1 airfield about a 1,000 yards from the shoreline. The division faced several steep sandy terraces each averaging 15 feet in height to reach the airfield.

Embedded

The United States Office of War Information was founded soon after the war began. The purpose, in part, to ensure the public's commitment to the war, create unity, and promote home front morale. Civilian and military reporters were embedded with the invasion forces. At Iwo Jima, by one account, there were 70 civilian correspondents.¹³ Professional journalists were recruited for the Marine Corps while others were employed by wire services and magazines, including the Associated Press and Scripps Howard Newspapers. Jack Smith, the future *LA Times* reporter and columnist, enlisted in the Marines in 1944 in time for the Battle of Iwo Jima. *Time and Life Magazines'* Robert Sherrod was embedded with the Marines on Iwo as well as on Attu, Tarawa, Saipan, and Okinawa.

¹³ James Bradley and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers*. (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), 145.

Still and motion picture photographers and combat artists were also among those documenting the fight. At home for 35 cents movie houses showed United Newsreel battle footage along with the movies and Saturday cartoons. *Life Magazine* hired fine artist Tom Lea, III. Trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, the El Paso, Texas native was at Guadalcanal and Pelilui. His gripping, sobering images of the Pacific War appeared in the magazine's June 1945 edition. Although Iwo and Okinawa were over by then, Lea's raw and graphic brutal works of art were tragic reminders of battlefield horrors. One image, titled *The Price*, shows a charging Marine, his left arm a cascading waterfall of blood. In an earlier century it was Russian artist Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin depictions of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) that exposed the horror in a way similar to what Tom Lea realized 66 years later. Their artwork requires little, if any, explanatory text.

D-Day

On the night before the invasion there was an eerie quietness within the bunking areas, the condition heightened by the dim safety lighting. At 0300 the men were woken to “all hear this” broadcast over the loud speakers. A warriors' breakfast of steak and eggs followed. There was still time to re-clean weapons and check equipment.

The average weight carried by a U.S. Marine or soldier in WW II was 80 to 100 pounds.¹⁴ One veteran BAR man (Browning Automatic Rifle) recalled carrying his BAR (weighing 19.4 lbs.) in addition to 240 rounds of ammo, an extra bandoleer slung around his shoulder, grenades, entrenchment tool, canteens of water, a bi-pod for his rifle, and pistol.¹⁵ Other equipment included the K-Bar combat knife, bolo knife, poncho, gas masks, empty sandbags, and first aid kits. Mortar men carried about 122

¹⁴ David Hambling, *The Overloaded Soldier: Why U.S. Infantry Now Carry More Weight Than Ever* Popular Mechanics, December 26, 2018. <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/research/a25644619/soldier-weight/> and William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 195

¹⁵ Robert J. Drez, “A Long Walk Through the Valley of Death” *World War II*, vol. 16, Number 4. November 2001, p. 36-37.

pounds while corpsmen approximately 51 pounds.¹⁶ The corpsmen learned by instinct to reach blindly into their bags for burn dressings, morphine syrettes, sulfa, scalpels and scissors, and other supplies. Iwo Jima was the first time whole blood was used on the battlefield. It was flown in from the west coast. Corpsmen didn't wear the brassards and crosses visible on Army medics at Normandy. They learned on Guadalcanal that the crosses were prime targets of Japanese snipers.

Men landing at Anzio, Peleliu, Normandy or Iwo had little protection. There was no body armor, no coat of mail, no Kevlar. Major General Julian C. Smith at Tawara noted his Marines' armor consisted of the Khaki shirts covering their upper bodies. The M-1 "steel pot" helmets helped. First introduced in 1941, their advantage was their versatility. You could cook in them, use as an entrenching tool, a hammer, washbasin or bucket, and as a seat; most commonly seen in the Pacific with a camouflage cover.

At 0630 came the order "over the rail." It was easy to sustain injuries while making it down the cargo nets. The trick was to avoid grabbing onto the horizontal ropes to prevent being stepped on by those following you from above. Timing was crucial. Marines trained to jump into the landing craft on the up swell. A miss step and tragically men were crushed between the landing craft and transports. Others descended into the holds of LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank). They climbed aboard amtracs and other amphibious water craft waiting for the wide bow doors to open. They were 4,000 yards from the beaches with an anticipated 30 minute ride to shore. The weather was clear and the seas calm that Monday morning.

Once in the landing craft, the tendency for the uninitiated was to peak above the side of the boat. Such stupidity could make one the target of a gunny sergeant's expletives to get their *GD* head down or loose it. As they circled waiting for the order to proceed to the beach, some were nearly a fixated and sick, overcome by diesel fumes; a soup of sea water and vomit at the bottom of the landing craft.

¹⁶ Ross, 62.

On D-Day Redlander Ensign Wayland Reynolds was piloting landing craft to and from the black sand beaches. Two months later he would repeat his actions at Okinawa.

Navy bombardment commenced around 0640. The first landing just after 0900 were not immediately subject to a barrage of Japanese fire. Within a short period of time 8,000 Marines made it on shore. Kuribayashi waited until the beach was clogged with troops and materials before unleashing the massive fire power. Marines were caught unaware. This baptism of fire signaled the beginning of the 36 day battle. The Americans would not know that 21,000 to 23,000 Japanese troops were entrenched on the island. The estimate was 13,000. Commanders later learned that their intelligence was off by nearly 40%. The calculations indicated that a larger defensive force could not sustain themselves due to the inadequate water supply. The Japanese were already surviving on a 50% reduction in daily water rations.

By dusk of D-Day 30,000 men were on shore. The beach was a demolition yard clogged with troops, upended landing craft, wrecked boats, and junked piles of equipment. Cranes were brought in to remove damaged equipment or demolition charges detonated to clear paths. Armored bulldozers were busy at work. The lack of space and confusion forced some to remain aboard landing craft overnight; others returned to their ships and re-boarded the following morning. On subsequent days high surf and undertows caused issues. Water craft sunk. Men drowned. When Len Mafioli landed on D-Day + 7 he was surprised by the number of casualties waiting for evacuation. Len said the, "eerie sound of dozens of plasma bottles hitting against the rifle barrels from which they were suspended, could be heard up and down the beaches." ¹⁷

It was difficult to get a foothold in the sand. Digging foxholes was akin to digging a hole in a barrel of wheat. Others likened the sand to talcum powder. Marines rigged creative ways to prop up the sides

¹⁷ M. Gy. Sgt. Len Maffioli (Ret.) and Maj. Bruce H. Norton, (Ret.), *Grown Gray in War – From Iwo Jima to the Chosin Reservoir to the Tel Offensive* (San Diego: Quadrant Books, 1997). 72.

of foxholes with lumber, artillery shell packing materials or other scrounged items. Craters left from weeks of bombing or created by recent mortar explosions were often more convenient than digging a foxhole. The hope was that a mortar or artillery round would not drop it the same spot twice or even, three times. This was not always the case. Enemy strongholds were destroyed only to find the Japanese behind the Marines as the Marines struggled to secure the next forward objective.

Those hopeful for a three to five day battle quickly realized it would be much longer. Combat correspondent Lt. Cyril P. Zurlinden reported, "Nothing any of us had ever known could compare with the utter anguish, frustration, and constant inner battle to maintain some semblance of sanity." ¹⁸ Peter Bowman, a one-time editor of *Popular Science and Mechanics Today*, penned his novella *Beach Red* in 1945. In it he wrote, "don't move. Don't lift your head . . . your belly deflates itself and lies flat against your backbone." ¹⁹

D-Day + 4

The image captured by Joe Rosenthal with his Speed Graphic camera has been retold and reinterpreted in books, movies, and other forms of literature and scholarship. History sleuths examine every photograph and related piece of evidence. They look at uniform creases and folds, weapons, head coverings, facial features, and anything else that can differentiate one man from another. The history of the two flag raisings continues to evolve. The last revision was in 2018-2019.

On the 23rd of February 1945, D-Day + 4, Easy Company of the 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division made their way to the 556 foot crest of the imposing Mt. Subibachi. The cold, wet weather from the day before had vanished. There was little opposition as Easy Company conquered their objective. A piece of cistern pipe salvaged from the rubble served as the pole from which a small American flag was unfurled. This 54" by 28" forty-eight starred flag came from the USS *Missoula*. The raising was

¹⁸ Colonel Joseph H. Alexander, *Closing In: Marines in the Seizure of Iwo Jima*. Marines in World War II Commemorative Series. (Washington, D.C.: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1994), 19.

¹⁹ Peter Bowman, *Beach Red* (New York: Random House, 1945), 14.

captured by *Leatherneck Magazine* photographer Lou Lowery. In a short time people on the ground and at sea were aware of the flag flying above Suribachi. A celebratory salute of ships' horns and whistles and the firing of artillery soon followed. About two hours later a larger flag, this one 96" by 54", was raised in its place. Marine Private Robert Campbell's photograph shows the smaller flag in the foreground as the new one is seen secured in the background. While Campbell photographed both flags in the one shot, Sergeant Bill Genaust captured the larger flag going up on eight seconds of color film with his 16 mm Bell and Howell Filmo movie camera. Nearby Rosenthal deftly lifted his camera into position, the shutter set at 1/400 and F Stop between 8 and 16, and triggered the shutter release.

Genaust was killed in action on March 4, 1945. Rosenthal did not see what became of his iconic image until later nor what was termed his "gung ho" shot taken after the 2nd flag was fastened in place. The former image appeared above the fold in Sunday, February 25 newspapers throughout the country. Immediately the public began requesting reprints. The bond drive that followed featured what at the time was assumed to be the three survivors of the original six flag raisers pictured in Rosenthal's photograph. Between \$24 and \$26 billion dollars was raised in the effort.

The book, *Flag of Our Fathers* released in 2000, is an examination of the lives of the six, the battle, and the subsequent bond drive. Written by James Bradley and co-authored by Ron Powers, the book spent 46 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list. Despite the recent discoveries, the book remains a tribute to the six by a son, James Bradley and, to all those who fought on Iwo Jima. It was the inspiration for the Clint Eastwood film by the same name and the companion piece, *Letters From Iwo Jima*.

Some believed that Rosenthal posed or staged his Pulitzer Prize winning photograph. This criticism is not valid, due in part, to the exhaustive and repeated examination of both flag raisings. The battle did not end with the flag raisings as portrayed in John Wayne's *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. Correspondents were soon off to other stories, other assignments. Despite the intense fighting continuing for some 30

more days, stories of the battle were demoted to sidebars in the nation's newspapers.

Rosenthal's iconic image was reproduced on postage stamps, posters and re-imagined and repurposed in numerous ways and forms. Felix de Weldon's sculpture based on the Rosenthal photograph located in Arlington, Virginia remains the iconic symbol for all Iwo Jima memorials. The massive 32 foot tall bronze figures have a commanding view of the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the Capitol Building. The two flags are displayed at the National Museum of the Marine Corps just outside Quantico, Virginia.

30 More Days

The battle continued. There were many more casualties on both sides. Humor managed to slip in occasionally, thus lightening the stress of the 24/7 fight. Signs such as an advertisement for the “Suribachi Heights Realty Company” promoting “ocean view, cool breezes and free fireworks nightly” appeared or this cautionary sign, “This foxhole is privately owned and constructed, with no “help from the Federal Housing Authority.”²⁰ The battle wound down. Death was ever present. Author William Manchester described those returning from the front lines,

. . . they had a different look – dull, sightless eyes showing the strain, misery, shock, sleeplessness, and in veteran fighters, the supreme indifference of young men who had lost their youth and will never recover it. . . Haggard, with jaws hanging open and the expressionless eyes of men who had left nowhere and were going nowhere.²¹

Battle casualties for rifle companies ranged from 60% to 75%. The Marine organizational structure from General down to the lowest private ensured continuity and sustained leadership. Majors and captains replaced colonels, lieutenants stepped in for wounded or killed captains, sergeants moved up in absence of lieutenants, and corporals took the lead when sergeants were no longer able. Although the battle was declared over on March 16, 1945, D-Day + 25, the actual fighting continued for another

²⁰ Ross, 203.

²¹ William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 300 and 417.

ten days. The final surrender occurred January 6, 1949 with the capitulation of two remaining Japanese soldiers.

Three cemeteries were established on Iwo, one for each division. The locations were determined prior to the battle. The deceased were laid out in a precise, respectful manner. Many Marines said their most difficult day was their last when they paid tribute to their fallen comrades. They cleaned up the best they could then proceeded to the cemeteries; it was a somber row by row walk looking for the graves of their fellow Marines. Survivor's guilt and wondering why me and not them was a common universal thought. John C. Love of the 4th Division paid tribute to the fallen by adapting new verse to the C. Austin Miles hymn "In the Garden"

At the Forth Division graveyard Iwo's bloody sands	strolled between the crosses Of Marines who'd met their end	In I
Smiling at me, from the sand cried as if my heart would break	And when I saw their faces Jesus took my hand	I Then
	He held my hand and spoke to me In a voice of golden tones Don't cry, my son, they walk with me Where they'll never be alone ²²	

Not all were buried in the cemeteries. Many evacuated to hospital ships and other vessels, who later died, were routinely buried at sea.

After the War

War is difficult to explain, especially to the uninitiated who do not understand the brotherhood between men who shared a foxhole, who haven't experienced the terror and sought to conquer the fears and anxiety or the loss of fellow Marines on the battlefield. Major General William T. Sherman in

²² "The Story of the Platoon Hymn." *The Fighting Fourth of WWII* 46 (March 2009): 20-21.

this often quoted statement said, “It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation.”²³ Marines typically did their best to set aside their wartime experiences. They chose not to retreat into the black hole of war. A revealing example is found in an article published in the 4th Marine Division newsletter. The sister of a Marine killed on Iwo Jima sought information on her brother. The response,

Unfortunately your request for information about George caused me to recall much that I struggled to forget. . . I understand your desire to know about George, but right now I find it difficult to recall so many unpleasant things in order to be more complete. . .²⁴

The Marines returned to the States. The majority received the well-earned *Ruptured Duck* honorable discharge patch. Marine divisions were deactivated. It was time for the veterans to get on with their lives. Many took advantage of the G.I. Bill, married, had careers, and raised families. They were intent on staying positive. Veterans of WWII were introduced to new areas and regions of the country. Farm boys from corn belt or those born and raised in the Bronx expanded their horizons. They developed close friendships with people they would have never met had they not served in the military. Some moved away from their hometowns. They began fresh where new friends did not expect the same person they were prior to the war. Less than a decade later some of these same veterans were again on the battlefield, this time near the 38th parallel north.

There are anecdotal accounts of children of WW II veterans with little or no knowledge of their fathers' military service finding trunks and boxes hidden in basements and attic corners. The fathers' lives take on new dimensions as understanding emerges through letters, photographs, military insignia, diaries, uniforms, and related materials. Author James Bradley and his brothers and sisters had no knowledge their Corpsman father received the Navy Cross for his service on Iwo Jima until after their father's passing.

²³ Civil War Biography William T. Sherman, American Battlefield Trust
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/william-t-sherman>

²⁴ “The Mystery of the Missing Brother.” *The Fighting Fourth of WWII* 36 (March 1999): 3.

In 1979 John F. Kennedy biographer and Marine veteran William Manchester penned his best selling novel titled *Goodbye, Darkness – A Memoir of the Pacific War*. Sergeant Manchester and many of his rag-tagged group of misfits, for the most part, managed to survive the war. The Purple Heart recipient was a veteran of Guadalcanal and Okinawa. My father introduced me to Manchester's book in the 1990s. Perhaps it was dad's way to explain what he went through without sharing his personal experiences despite the 50 year time lapse. Manchester was dad's voice. He was not alone.

The crack would occasionally widen letting a little information escape. Dad wrote, "Somethings I would sometimes rather forget, but there are times I cannot push them out of my mind."²⁵ Filmmaker Michael Moore's father served in the Marines. His Pacific War experiences had profound, lasting effects. In 1942 Francis Richard Moore enlisted in the Corps. His 1st Division fought at Guadalcanal, the Battle of Cape Gloucester, Peleliu, and Okinawa. In his 2014 obituary, the former Marine and General Motors assembly line worker was quoted, "Anyone who has seen war first hand would never ever start one."²⁶ Moore remained a pacifist the balance of his life. Charlie Kohler, age 99 and a member of the 4th Division with whom my father served, recently noted,

The ultimate failure on mankind is war. The reason that we have these wars because there's a lot of old men out there don't know what the hell they are doing and they start these wars and guess what? They send us young guys to fight them. It's killing people that don't want to be killed, don't want to fight. It doesn't seem right does it?²⁷

The veterans were changed men. Even today it is difficult for the few remaining survivors to talk about it. When they came home they didn't want to live with the memories. Years later some opened up, to

²⁵ Spiller, (Forward), iii.

²⁶ Roberto Acosta, *Frank Moore, father of filmmaker, author Michael Moore, remembered for kind nature* (Advance Local

Media LLC, April 22, 2014) https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2014/04/frank_moore_father_of_filmmake.html

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcpxTJzIVE>

grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They explain it is important for the younger generations to have an understanding of what they went through. They feel guilty for having survived. Despite sharing, they wish they didn't need to. War affected them in different ways. Some became pacifists as in the case of Moore's late father. For others, it was too much to bear. Lives ended early. Alcohol and drugs, suicide, a reality all too common for today's veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan; many suffering unseen wounds.

Manchester's book was my father's voice, but only to a point. Dad eventually wrote his Marine memoirs, completed just before his death at age 89. His comments on Iwo are raw, emotional, more forthright than anything else he put down on paper. Nothing could compare to Iwo despite or in spite of his having lived through the December 7, 1941 shelling of Midway Island, the subsequent Battle of Midway, and the landings of Roi-Namur, Saipan, and Tinian. He reported,

Days meant nothing to us. It was hour by hour. When we felt we had attained a ridge we found that there was another to go over, piles of rock behind us. The ground was always hot and steaming. At night we would put our ponchos under us to keep cooler. The stench of the sulfur was always haunting us, as if to say you'll never leave hell. We cursed the rain, we cursed the Japs, we cursed the sand, we cursed the continuous sleepless nights, and we cursed that we had no mail for weeks.²⁸

The Pacific War and the Battle of Iwo Jima are well documented and researched. A bibliographical resource published in 2005 lists more than 800 Iwo Jima citations; books, magazines, documents, audio visual materials, and online resources.²⁹ There are several military and collecting institutions accessible to researchers. Among these institutions are the National Archives College Park, Maryland campus, U. S. military personnel records housed in St. Louis, Ancestry.com and other genealogical databases, the Alfred M. Gray Marine Corps Research Center and the Marine Corps History Division at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, the National Museum of the Marine Corps, and The National

²⁸ Spiller, 99-100.

²⁹ Walt Sandberg, *The Battle of Iwo Jima: A Resource Bibliography and Documentary Anthology* (Jefferson, NC., McFarland & Company, 2004).

World War II Museum in addition to the numerous books and online resources.

The Veterans History Project initiated by the Library of Congress has made a concerted effort to reach out to veterans to capture their stories, from veterans of World War I to the present. High school students, teachers, veterans' children and other family members, and volunteers have and continue to interview our veterans. The Library collects, preserves, and makes accessible these remembrances, including video interviews, transcripts, diaries, and related materials with much of it available online. Contained in the History Project collections are veterans' letters. Although correspondence was subject to censorship, these personal, first-person accounts provide invaluable insights into life in the midst of battle and the challenges faced. A comment by my father in a letter written after a battle contains the following, "It was a little hot the first night for us and it rained but that couldn't cool us off, it was the wrong kind of heat."³⁰ Some found alternative ways to get information to families, including befriending civilians not subject to censorship. The civilians wrote letters containing information redacted in the GI's correspondence.

A comprehensive examination of the U.S. Navy operations in World War II, including the Battle of Iwo Jima, is found in a 15 volume work by Harvard educated historian and professor, Dr. Samuel Elliot Morison. The biographer of Christopher Columbus, John Paul Jones, and Samuel de Champlain among others, Morison received a Lt. Commander's commission in the U. S. Naval Reserve for the purpose of documenting the Navy's WW II history. The 14th volume titled *Victory in the Pacific 1945* was released in 1960 and in part, addresses the Battle of Iwo Jima.

There are accounts written by veterans willing to share their experiences, some in prose, others in poetry and verse. Perhaps it was their way of exorcising the demons and/or a therapeutic release; for others, a professional obligation as with war correspondents Robert Sherrod and Alvin Josephy. Their

³⁰ Spiller, 7.

writings help answer questions, provide insights into what they and so many others endured; individual stories that otherwise would be lost amid the chaos of battle and the subsequent years. One of the most epic war poems is *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. There are many examples coming out of the trenches of World War I, and then, those contemporaneous to the fight on Iwo Jima and others, penned years later. One stanza from a multi-lined poem by Carl Dearborn, a member of Fox Company, 25th Regiment, 4th Marine Division reads,

Nightly, star-shells flood the wasteland
Brightly white, through choking dust
For the battle knows no night-time,
No respite, from bloody lust.³¹

Dearborn traveled to Iwo in 1995. He penned a poem titled *Second Iwo Landing*,

We returned to Bloody Iwo
In 1995
Still hurting from the memories
Yet thankful to be alive

The beaches are all silent now;
Time has washed the black sand clean.
There's silence all around us.
Is this another bad dream

No, it's past! It's gone forever!
Yet, the memories linger through the tears.
It's etched upon our minds and souls;
It's now been 50 years³²

One early first-person recollection was authored by Allen R. Matthews. His book, titled *The Assault*, was published in 1947. Pulled from battle on D-Day + 12, Matthews wasted no time writing his account while hospitalized in Guam. His book has a narrow focus, from crater to foxhole to the next ledge, another crater, move up, reposition, dig a deeper hole, and make sure to limit the number of Marines in any one foxhole while always on alert. He shares his story of the immediacy around him.

³¹ Carl Dearborn, "F" Company, 25th Rgt, 4th Marine Division, From his collection *Marine Verses From WWII*

³² Carl Dearborn, "Second Iwo Landing," *Leatherneck Magazine* 79, no. 5 (May 1996): 72.

Matthews does not have nor can he comprehend the overall strategy. Few of the infamous landmark objectives are noted. This is his first time in combat. He seeks the advice, the reassurance of his combat experienced fellow Marines. There is no mention of the flag raisings. He listens for sounds and knowing when to duck. He does his best to avoid mortars, artillery, machine gun fire, grenades, and snipers. The soft, talcum-like volcanic sand helps absorb the shocks, at times limiting the explosions' devastating effects. And, the sand got into everything – eyes, food, rifles and guns, wounds, the mouth, and other orifices. The stench of death attracts flies in swarms. Starshells launched high in the air create an artificial and eerie light as they float to the earth in the dark of night. Is that a bush or an enemy sniper crouching, waiting for you to move, to place a well-aimed shot ending your life? The Japanese spigot mortar known by several nicknames left an indelible memory on the Marines. Fired from a crude platform, the 320 mm shell (the size of a 55 gallon drum) weighing 500 pounds (others saying 1,000 pounds) was wholly inaccurate, unpredictable. It was as if an overhead freight train was bearing down upon them. These floating "bubbly-wubbly" ashcan rockets were capable of creating a crater eight feet deep by fifteen feet wide. There is little respite from the nearly constant, deafening noise and the accompanying shock waves. The cold and rain brings on tremors. Depending on the size of your foxhole, extremities cramped. Nerves tingle with sharp pain. Few shave. There are no mirrors. A glance at the guy next to you tells you all you need to know. Uniforms are encrusted with sweat, the dried paste-like sand and who knows what else. You are lucky if you have clean underwear and socks. Matthews witnessed death all around him, gruesome death. Many wounded did not want to be evacuated. They felt the need to stay with their fellow Marines. Captain Lawrence Snowden was wounded on D-Day + 6 or 7 and evacuated to Guam. Sufficiently healed, he and another officer grabbed a flight back to Iwo with a load of blood plasma and mail. The two stretched out on top of the mail sacks. By then Motoyama #1 airfield was under American control. It was essential for them to return to their Marines.

Richard Wheeler, a member of the 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division, penned his first-person account titled *The Bloody Battle for Suribachi* in 1965. In subsequent years the prolific author produced several books on the Civil War. He delved into Gettysburg, William T. Sherman and Stonewall Jackson,

McClellan's peninsula campaign, and others. And, he returned to further explore his personal battle in the Pacific. Eugene Sledge, in his 1981 memoir *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, kept notes on the battlefield in a small New Testament tucked into a uniform pocket. Another veteran-written first-person account is *Helmet for My Pillow*, first released in 1957 by Marine veteran, journalist, and historian Robert Leckie. The Sledge and Leckie autobiographical accounts were the basis for the HBO *Pacific Series* (2010) produced by Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg, and Gary Goetzman. Others waited until late in life to write their accounts as was the case with Len Maffioli or senior general officers, Major General Fred Haynes and Lt. General Lawrence Snowden. Haynes was a young officer on Iwo along with Snowden. Haynes' book, *The Lions of Iwo Jima*, was released in 2009 and Snowden's book, *One Marine's Indebtedness to the Corps*, came out in 2016. Snowden passed away on the 18 of February 2017; the eve of the 72nd anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Souvenirs

History is littered with accounts of collecting souvenirs, trophies of war. Fine art was pillaged from Belgium, Italy, Prussia, and Austria during the Napoleonic Wars and the Parthenon's Elgin Marbles removed by the British in 1801. The individual soldier or Marine on Iwo carried items home. Although not nearly as precious or valuable as the Elgin Marbles, many of these items once held great personal value for their former owners. On Iwo Jima these spoils of war included Japanese flags, samurai swords, rifles and pistols, blankets, paper money, and watches, cloth hats and gloves, and photographs, letters, and diaries. Marines sometimes compromised their personal safety. They entered booby-trapped caves and pill boxes seeking pillage; lives lost due to stupidity and an overzealous desire to acquire objects. Soon after the war ended the *Guidebook for Marines* was released. More or less a handbook or *Bible* of the Marine Corps, it contains a section on discipline, including a pronouncement on "Scavenging Discipline." The pronouncement reads in part,

The mania for collecting souvenirs has cost many lives and will cost more unless discipline is enforced. . . If you let your desire for souvenirs override the need for fighting, you may pay for it with wounds or death. No one can sympathize with you when you pay the price. You have been irresponsible, undisciplined, and have failed in your job as a Marine. ³³

³³

Guidebook for Marines, (Washington, DC, Leatherneck Association, Inc., 1946): 16.

For several years a government program as well as non-profits have facilitated the return of objects acquired in the Pacific War. A program of Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare managed in the United States through the Japanese Embassy and various consulates scattered throughout the country works with donors and researchers to return objects to surviving family members.³⁴ The Obon Society, a small not-for-profit in Astoria, Oregon, makes a concerted effort to return the Yosegaki Hinomaru or Japanese good luck flags. These flags often featured written messages from family members. In May of 2020 the Cooper Museum of Upland returned an Hinomaru through the Obon Society. The flag was donated to the museum in 1964 by a prominent Rancho Cucamonga, California family member.³⁵

Connecting with Comrades

Many found comradeship in organizations with other veterans, including The American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, and the Marine Corps League. Marine regiment and division veteran associations along with smaller units were created. The Fighting Fourth held their first reunion in 1947. Now dissolved, they once boasted as many as 17 chapters nationwide with 800 to 1,000 attending their annual reunions. The former Marines renewed the bonds created in training and the intensity of battle. Lt. General Snowden recalled, "The closest friendships are built between those who have shared adversity and Lord knows the 4th Division Marines shared a lot of adversity."³⁶

Dinners at Camp Pendleton

In the 1980s the annual Iwo Jima Commemorative Banquet & Memorial was established at Camp Pendleton. For the veterans and their families there were behind-the-scenes tours of nearby Marine and Navy installations, opportunities to converse with young Marines at chow, view static displays,

³⁴ Return of World War II Artifacts, Embassy of Japan in the United States of America. <https://www.us.embjapan.go.jp/english/html/world-war-2-artifact-recovery.html>

³⁵ Joe Blackstock, Last relic of slain Japanese soldier to be returned to family, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, May 4, 2020

<https://www.dailybulletin.com/2020/05/04/last-relic-of-slain-japanese-soldier-to-be-returned-to-family/>

³⁶ "Extracts of Remarks by Lt. General Lawrence F. Snowden USMC (Ret)." *The Fighting Forth of WWII* (September 1990): 34.

and attend recruit graduation. At the banquet, with the crowd at times in excess of a 1,000, were displays of Marine memorabilia, a reenactment of the flag raising, an empty chair tribute, and the celebratory cake cutting with the oldest and youngest Marine in attendance receiving the first bites. Featured speakers included *LA Times* columnist Jack Smith, actor and Navy veteran Robert Stack, Lt. Gen. Lawrence F. Snowden (Ret), author James Bradley, the 29th Commandant of the Marines, General Alfred Gray, and future U.S. Secretary of Defense, General James Mattis.

Reunion of Honor

In 1968 Iwo Jima was returned to the Japanese government, although a U. S. Coast Guard Station remained there until 1993. The island was renamed *Iwo To* in 2007 or more correctly, the name reverted to the original nomenclature. Today there is a small Japanese military presence on the Island. Iwo bears little resemblance to the 19 February 1945 nearly barren and ravaged topography. Bomb craters, fox holes, and the pock-marked landscape are camouflaged by the reestablished landscape. In many cases, the tunnels and pill boxes are hidden, sealed up or were destroyed during the 36 days of fighting. The isolated island remains one of the best preserved battlefields in the world.

In 1985 survivors of the battle returned to Iwo Jima, veterans on both sides and widows of Japanese who never made it off the island. Accompanying the survivors was Oscar and Emmy award winning filmmaker Arnold Shapiro. That same year Shapiro released his documentary *Return to Iwo Jima*. *LA Times* columnist and former Marine war correspondent Jack Smith wrote that he attended a preview screening. Smith landed in the third wave on D-Day. He wrote,

The film focuses on these men, as individuals, as they try to express themselves; the bitterness, the guilt, the enmity; and finally, the feeling of forgiveness and reconciliation. . . There was reason enough for bitterness on both sides. In the end, reluctantly, tearfully, choking as they try to say it, the survivors forgive--not only the enemy but themselves. I think that is why so few men write well about their war experiences. The hard part is forgiving yourself. ³⁷

³⁷ Jack Smith, "Forty years later, survivors return to Iwo Jima, their painful memories in focus," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1985, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-05-27-vw-6402-story.html>.

Although Smith had in previous columns mentioned his participation in the epic battle, he opted not to explain what kept him up at night. On May 27, 1985 Smith ultimately shared with his readers the first intimate minutes on the beach, what he saw and experienced, and his survival while others died at his very side. After explaining, he concludes, “So now that I’ve got that off my chest, maybe I can forgive the Japanese and me.”³⁸

Access to Iwo is problematic. One day a year in March an early morning flight leaves Guam. This two-hour trip is the only way the general public can get on the island. This is the Reunion of Honor established in 1995 by the late Lt. General Snowden working with Military Historical Tours, the Iwo Jima Association of America, the government of Japan, and the US Marine Corps. The General and Iwo Jima veteran believed in healing and forgiveness. Snowden stated the joint reunion “would be to honor the dead on both sides . . . that such warfare that existed on Iwo Jima would never happen again.”³⁹ As the flight nears the destination, the pilots purposely circle the island giving their passengers a 360° panoramic view of Iwo prior to landing. Redlanders Dave Maupin and the late Wayland Reynolds made this trip. Maupin is a former U.S. Navy navigator. Reynolds, who was a school teacher, administrator, and columnist for the *Redlands Daily Facts*, returned to where he as a young Ensign piloted landing craft under constant shelling, D-Day, 19 February 1945. Wayland Reynolds was accompanied on the return by his Navy doctor grandson.

Returning to the battlefield for Iwo Jima veterans is not an option for many. And, then, why would veterans choose to bring up their memories by visiting the remote island? Many refuse even if they have the financial means or are healthy to travel. Those who do visit this site of their youth are not unlike members of the GAR and the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) who met on the battlefield of Gettysburg over a century ago. Both sides participate in the Reunion of Honor.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lt. General Lawrence F. Snowden, *Snowden's Story – One Marine's Indebtedness to the Corps* (Tallahassee, FL: Turtle Cove Press, 2016), 162-163.

My parents departed from LAX in March 1995. They were among 900 veterans, family members, and others who flew to Guam, Saipan, and Iwo Jima. They landed on Iwo the 14 March 1995. There was a memorial service with American and Japanese representatives, including Commandant of the Marine Corps General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., American Ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale, and the widow of General Kuribayashi. Some veterans and their families felt slighted on this 50th anniversary trip. They endured two hours of speeches with many never making it to Mt. Suribachi. One veteran's wife wrote,

It was a visit filled with contrast, some anger and many unanswered questions. . . During the entire day I watched the survivors, I had watched their faces and listened to their conversations . . . I realized I had been seeing something very special, and also realized the most cherished memory I would carry home for me was the wonderful closeness, the camaraderie – that has remained firm and strong among these survivors over the past fifty years.”⁴⁰

There were those that day in 1995 who successfully reached the top of Suribachi. Many unfurled their personal Stars and Stripes. Along with the static monuments are dozens of draped dog tags forming a dynamic and fluid memorial left by veterans and active service members. The sojourners armed with Ziploc® bags or water bottles made their way to the beaches. They scooped up the black sand upon which the blood of their fellow Marines or perhaps their own was drenched, consecrated. Present were thoughts of lost buddies and the good times in between moments of terror. When they left the island that afternoon there was a feeling of relief. Their pilot came over the loud speaker explaining a bit 'tongue in cheek' that more lift was needed. He asks everyone to breath in little due to the increased weight from the sand onboard. When my parents got home, my dad repurposed used Tic Tac® breath mint containers to give samples of the volcanic sand to family and friends.

Conclusion

The hard fought battle to take Iwo Jima came at great human cost. The B-29s now had a refuge on the long flight between the Marianas and Japan. Some 20,000 crew members found safety on the sulfur island rather than ditching into the Pacific. They would argue with reason that Iwo Jima was worth the

40

Englert, Bettye.

"Return." *The Fighting Forth of WWII* (September 1995): 13 - 14. Reprinted from Los Angeles Chapter #2 The Forth Marine Division Association Newsletter.

cost. What was next? When the 4th returned to Maui, the 5th to the Big Island, and the 3rd to Guam they expected more fighting. They recuperated, replacements were brought in, and training continued. Preparation for the invasion of mainland Japan, titled *Operation Olympic*, was underway. A blockade was also being considered. Fortunately, neither occurred. The subsequent Battle for Okinawa, the fire bombing of Tokyo and other cities coupled with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and additional factors brought the war to an end. Emperor Hirohito agreed to an unconditional surrender negating any further fighting. The documents were signed on board the USS *Missouri* September 2, 1945.

On the occasion of the 74th anniversary of the Battle for Iwo Jima, former Commandant of the Marine Corps General Robert Neller standing on the island spoke the following,

Few places mean as much to the United States Marines and few battles bond us so tightly to our heritage as Iwo Jima. More than 26,000 men died here. . . it is proper that every year Marines and our Japanese allies return to this hallowed ground to honor the sacrifices of those who made their last stand on these black sands. ⁴¹

I don't recall my father ever encouraging me to join the armed forces. The late 1960s and early 70s were a different time. We were in a divisive, unpopular war; a war with a draft, lottery, crossings to Canada, and college deferments. My lottery number was somewhere in the mid-200s. The likelihood of getting drafted slim to none. I did not face the recruiter's well-used challenge, "you wouldn't be able to handle that." Perhaps my dad in his silence did not want me to experience what he and so many others went through. Yet, from a young age I learned patriotism through him. I knew all three verses of the Marine's Hymn, joined the Sons of the American Legion, read dad's Marine *Leatherneck Magazines*, and made sure my Boy Scout belt was properly aligned with my uniform shirt and pants. My neckerchief was absent any wrinkles. Perhaps appropriately, our scout troop met in a repurposed Quonset Hut.

⁴¹ Matthew Burke, *Surviving veterans of Iwo Jima reunite for WWII battle's 74th anniversary* (Stars and Stripes, March 25, 2019).

<https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/surviving-veterans-of-iwo-jima-reunite-for-wwii-battle-s-74th-anniversary-1.574204>

Most would agree their fathers didn't much talk about their time in battle, whether the Battle of the Bulge, the Tet Offensive or Iwo Jima. There were very good reasons why they did not. Some wrote their memoirs, yet most seem incomplete. In the end, we had a lifetime with our fathers to ask, but didn't or at least, didn't ask enough or didn't know the right questions or ask in a way that would elicit responses. And if we had, could we really know what they went through? Not really.

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