

DEATH VALLEY, IWO JIMA

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On June 19, 1944, as the Japanese unleashed their air offensive against the U.S. Fifth Fleet in the Philippine Sea, 101 land-based Japanese aircraft scrambled off the island of Iwo Jima. They were to lend their weight to the combined air attack to regain Japanese naval strength in the operation known as A-Go. None of the 101 planes ever returned. They became part of the one-sided statistics in the staggering losses suffered by the Japanese in the Marianas Turkey Shoot.

With the loss of the sea battle, the Imperial Japanese Navy was a navy in name only. The losses of planes and pilots, even though most of these pilots were inexperienced, meant that despite the existence of a few surviving carriers they were now useless—there were no aircraft and no men to fly them. Japan could not mount an offensive challenge to the mighty U.S. Fifth Fleet. The great carrier battles that had begun at the Coral Sea were over.

With the elimination of the Japanese Navy, Marines invaded and secured the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam between June 15 and August 10, and then set their sights on the next set of islands leading to the gateway of Japan itself: the Bonin and Volcano Islands, only 660 miles from the Japanese mainland. The most prominent island, with terrain suitable for airfields, was the tiny island of Iwo Jima.

For the Japanese, the defeat of Operation A-Go meant a change in tactics. Their defense would be without the support of naval or air forces, and while they had substantial ground forces—almost thirty untouched divisions—the question was, could they be used

effectively in the continuing island campaign of the Pacific?

Imperial Japanese headquarters had little choice. To continue the war—surrender was not an option—they would dig in and fight to the death. They decided to fortify the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa and conduct a war of attrition against the invading Americans. The 109th Division was assigned to be the main force to defend Iwo Jima.

The Japanese premier, Gen. Hideki Tojo, recognized the seriousness of the American advance across the Central Pacific but had little with which to stop them. For the defense of Iwo Jima, he called upon a fifty-three-year-old samurai warrior, Lt.Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi, who came from a military family that had served six emperors in the Army. He had commanded Imperial troops in their glory days during the conquests of Manchuria and China. Because of his excellent credentials during his thirty-year military career, Emperor Hirohito personally picked Kuribayashi to be the defender of Iwo Jima. But it was more than defending a small island; Iwo Jima was, in fact, part of Japan proper, and allowing an invasion of Iwo Jima would carry the same disgrace as an invasion of the Japanese mainland.

The general accepted his post without hesitation, but revealed his sober understanding of the consequences of his assignment in a letter to his brother. He was being called upon to defend Iwo Jima; not to save the island from conquest, but to defend it and make the American invading forces pay a staggering price for its possession. “I may not return alive from this assignment,” he wrote, “...but I shall fight to the best of my ability, so that no disgrace will be brought upon our family. I will fight as a son of Kuribayashi, the Samurai.”

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While Kuribayashi had been leading victorious troops in Manchuria and China in 1940, sixteen-year-old Jay Rebstock was a student at Gulf Coast Military Academy in Gulfport, Mississippi. Rebstock was born on February 2, 1924, and, at the tender age of eleven, had played peewee football while attending school at St. Stanislaus Academy in Bay St. Louis. Playing on the varsity, several years older than he, was a big kid named Doc Blanchard who pounded through the lines of opposing schools and ran roughshod over frustrated tacklers. This big, bruising kid with the pounding running style would become a household name several years later during a glorious football career at the United States Military Academy.

Gulf Coast Military Academy was a long way from West Point, but so was an island named Oahu and a place called Pearl Harbor. Rebstock heard those names for the first time while watching a movie in a Gulfport theater. Suddenly the screen went blank, the house lights came up, and an announcer came on stage and said that the Japanese had bombed the fleet at Pearl Harbor. Most of the youngsters didn't even know where that was, and the audience buzzed with questions. While everyone was puzzled by the

announcement, Rebstock's friend, sitting next to him, nudged him. He leaned over and said, "I know where Pearl Harbor is. It's in Hawaii. My brother is serving on a battleship named *Oklahoma!*"

Young Rebstock went back to the campus that night, and began to figure out his next move. He decided that the one way he could get out of school, which he detested, was to join the service. He mustered his courage and went to call his family at the only pay phone for miles around, only to find a line that wrapped around the block. Finally, after three hours of shuffling forward a few feet at a time, it was his turn, and he stepped into the booth and dialed his familiar home number. His father answered and Rebstock cleared his throat and spoke forcefully into the receiver. "Daddy," he said to the elder Rebstock on the other end, "I'm quitting school and joining the Army to fight the Japs!"

At first there was silence on the other end, but then he heard his father's curt voice telling him that if he tried to do that, and if he walked away from the academy, he wouldn't have to wait for the Japs to fight. He would personally give the youngster all the fight that he could ever want. More than a little discouraged, Jay hung up and realized as he trudged back to his room that his short fantasy about the Army was over.

He stayed in Gulf Coast Academy and finished school, graduating in June of 1943, on crutches. In his final football season, he had torn a cartilage in his knee. Corrective surgery was successful, but it left Rebstock 4-F with the selective service, much to his family's delight.

Rebstock found a job in the oil field and served as a roughneck doing backbreaking work for six months. His heart was not in it. All of his friends were in the service, and that's where he wanted to be. Some 4-Fers were delighted to take a pass on serving, but not Jay Rebstock. He'd gone to Keesler Field to try and join the Air Corps, but had been turned down, and then he tried the Merchant Marine at Pass Christian on the Gulf Coast, but the answer was the same. The bad knee was not acceptable. He simply could not pass the physical.

In 1943 there was a mandatory draft to fill the needs of the services. A young man could not just join the service he wanted. He had to be drafted, and then Uncle Sam decided where he was needed. One morning, while working in the oil field, Rebstock decided to give it one more try. He went to his foreman and told him that he was going to Thibodaux to visit the draft board, and then hitchhiked to the small south Louisiana city. He went to the draft board and asked to be drafted, and in two weeks his "greetings" came. Rebstock's father was not thrilled that his young son had persisted in trying to get in the service and even criticized him for not just taking the 4-F classification and sitting it out. But young Jay was of a different mind; he felt left out. He felt that he had to do his duty, as all his friends were doing. He, like the rest of the nation, had been energized by the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, which was a call to arms. He had also heard the words "chicken" and "draft-dodger," and bristled at the accusation that he had been able to avoid the draft

because his father was the head of the ration board. Even the head of the draft board had joked that if he drafted young Jay, he'd have his rations cut. Of course, there was no truth to that, but that didn't stop it from being said.

Finally, Rebstock reported to New Orleans and lined up with a thousand other young men at the draft headquarters. He talked with several of his friends about joining the Marine Corps, especially the Raiders. He'd read about the Raiders in an issue of the *Reader's Digest*, and their bold fighting spirit appealed to him. His friends agreed and, like most young men, they wanted to be in an elite force.

When the time came to line up for selecting the service that they might want, the Army and the Coast Guard recruiters spoke to them using very civil language. It was "Gentlemen" this, and "Gentlemen" that, and "Please fill out this," and "Please line up over there." But the Marine Corps representative was having none of that. He was a small tough-as-nails Marine sergeant who was a veteran of Guadalcanal.

"He only weighed 140 pounds," Rebstock remembered, "but he talked as if he weighed 250 and could whip everyone there."

The Marine veteran sneered and talked down to everyone as he sauntered in front of the men. He used words like "worthless" and "scum" and "maggots," as he paced back and forth. When he flashed a look at anyone, that person could not hold his stare, and usually ended up looking at the ground. Everyone else was wide-eyed.

Finally the sergeant bellowed out for those who thought they could make it in the Corps, and who wanted to be Marines, to take two steps forward. He stood at parade rest, with his arms folded as he waited for the answer to his challenge.

Jay Rebstock straightened his shoulders, took a deep breath, and stepped forward. He looked straight ahead and waited for the next order. When it didn't come, he glanced a look over his shoulder to see where his friends were; they were all back in the ranks, shaking their heads and avoiding his eyes. He was the only person standing two paces in front of the formation, and the feisty sergeant claimed his prize.

The next step was the dreaded physical and, as each phase of it was conducted, Rebstock held his breath. It was a very fast examination, and he passed. He breathed a sigh of relief while a young Navy doctor went over his papers and asked if he had any identifying scars. The "identifying scars" question was a standard on all the physicals, and Rebstock remembered that the tough little Marine sergeant had mockingly told them it was so that someone could identify your dead ass after your face was blown off.

Jay began showing every little nick and cut, and finally showed the big scar on his knee. The doctor raised his eyebrows and wanted to know how he got it. Rebstock explained the football injury and the resulting surgery, and watched as the doctor shook his head. He

told the eager young man that there was no way he could get into the service.

Young Jay looked as if he had been struck with a hammer, and then completely broke down and began to cry. He begged the doctor to let him in. He said he had been doing hard manual labor, and it didn't bother him; he swore he could bend his knee all the way—which he couldn't—and that he could do anything that anyone else could. The doctor was so moved by the young man's pleading, with tears running down his face, that he stamped his papers and told him that if he wanted in so badly, he was in.

A delighted Jay Rebstock was off to boot camp. By December 1943 Jay Rebstock had finished boot camp, and in February 1944 he was assigned to the 5th Marine Division.

The 5th Division may have been new in name, but it was very old in experience. It boasted many old raider veterans and experienced paratroopers, as well as veterans from the early fights at Guadalcanal and Choiseul and Bougainville. In those elite numbers was the legendary John Basilone, who had won the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal and opted to go back into combat rather than sit on the sidelines. The presence of all these veterans gave confidence to newer Marines like Rebstock. For the next seven months, the 5th Division trained in the United States, and Rebstock was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines. The three regiments forming the 5th Division were the 26th, 27th, and 28th Marines.

By August, the division was sharp and went to Hawaii for additional training, making numerous amphibious landings in preparation for the next assault. The Marine tactics that had been developed for this island-hopping war were attack and push; attack and keep advancing; don't stop unless it was unavoidable; bypass the enemy and let the following troops mp them up; charge, attack, push; give the enemy no rest. The division practiced until they could all do it in their sleep.

The scuttlebutt all through training was that the division would be used in the next landings, in either Formosa or China. Rebstock had a Marine emblem tattooed on his arm.

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While young PFC Jay Rebstock was getting his arm tattooed, Gen. Kuribayashi was busy facing a daunting task on the island of Iwo Jima. He had arrived on June 13, 1944, in a flying boat at the East Boat Basin and had trudged up the sloping terrain to his headquarters at the village of Motoyama, which sat just above Chidori Airfield (Airfield No. 1). Motoyama was at the second dormant volcano on the island. The other was Mount Suribachi.

After his first inspection, he was disheartened at the state of defensive preparations. There had been no unity, no coordination in

preparing the defenses, and, in fact, the job of fortifying the island had been hindered by interservice rivalry and distrust between the Army and the Navy.

To make matters worse, one month before he arrived, Gen. Obata and MGen. Tamura, who would command the embattled troops on Saipan, had made an inspection of Iwo Jima. Gen. Tamura concluded the inspection with an order that any guns located in the north on the high ground should be brought down and placed in pillboxes to defend against the enemy if they landed on the beaches. The guns in the northern regions of the island, he claimed, were useless where they were and must be put into a position to conform with the Tamura Doctrine.

The problem was that the American invading forces had never been annihilated on the beach, and the beach line had never successfully been defended. Even the huge German Army had been unable to throw the American forces back into the sea at Normandy. How this would be successfully accomplished now was not a subject that Gen. Tamura addressed.

He simply championed this beach-line tactic, which was, in his mind, plain common sense. He wasn't alone in his thinking. It was a tactic that was recognized and accepted by most tacticians. The idea was that the defending force would keep a big force in reserve and, after observing where the enemy was making his landing, would attack with that reserve and crush the attack at the water's edge, where it was most vulnerable. It was taught in the Japanese Military Academy and the War College. But Gen. Tamura had not heeded a small caveat listed in the operation manual, *Sakusen Yomurci*. There was a warning stating that, against an overwhelmingly armed enemy, a defense in depth must be made with a series of strong fortified positions.

After his proclamation of the beach-line defense at Iwo Jima, Gen. Tamura, along with Gen. Obata, went off to defend Saipan with the Tamura Doctrine. On June 15, two days after Gen. Kuribayashi arrived at Iwo Jima, the thirty-two thousand troops on Saipan were in a position to defend the beach line and hurl the Marines back into the sea once they touched down.

After two days of shore bombardment from the Americans, most Japanese beach defenses were nonexistent, and eight battalions of Marines made their run into the Saipan beaches. Eight thousand Marines reached the beach in the first twenty minutes. By nightfall, twenty thousand had landed and, even though they had sustained two thousand casualties, they had a toehold. Two days later, the overwhelming American force had reached the opposite side and began a pivot to the north to take the rest of the 14-mile-long island.

For two weeks, the Japanese fell back, inflicting many casualties on the Americans while dying by the thousands themselves. At the end, Gen. Tamura's force on Saipan was annihilated, and Gen. Tamura himself was dead, along with the Tamura Doctrine. For Gen. Kuribayashi on Iwo Jima, his doctrine would be a defense in depth.

On June 29, 1944, two weeks after Gen. Kuribayashi arrived at Iwo Jima, one of his staff officers, Maj. Yoshitaka Hone, joined him, landing by aircraft at Motoyama No. 1. As he approached the island, the major could see the remains of aircraft victims of constant American air attack, pushed to the sides of the runway. On the southern tip, Mount Suribachi thrust its ugly 550 feet into the sky. The volcano was attached to the rest of the island by a narrow neck that widened into an ascending plateau on which the airfields were built. From the air, the island resembled a pork chop.

The black sand beaches on the east coast were in several distinct terraces; the sand on the western coast was more golden. The land to the north was as different as the plateau was from Suribachi. The northern third of the island was a land best described as a moonscape of rocky outcroppings. It looked prehistoric, with deep canyons and jutting rocks, countless caves, and steaming sulfur hissing out of the ground. Many Marines described it as the worst badlands they had ever seen. Iwo Jima was an evil, foreboding, waterless, lifeless place.

Maj. Horie thought it would be a wonderful thing if somehow he could sink this wretched island into the sea. Then it would have no interest for the Americans, and they would not come here, and Japan could be spared a great tragedy. He knew that from Iwo Jima, even the slowest planes were only three hours from Tokyo.

After the fall of the Marianas, it was obvious that the Bonin Islands and Iwo Jima, because of its airfields, would be the next target. The Japanese wanted to defend at all costs because of the danger Iwo Jima would present to the motherland if it fell into enemy hands; the Americans needed Iwo Jima out of the way, since its radar gave the mainland ample warning of approaching bomber strikes. Early warning meant fighters scrambled to greet the bombers, which flew with no fighter escort. But with Iwo Jima in American hands, American bombers would have only a short flight to drop their devastating loads.

Bombing missions, especially those being flown by the newly arrived B-29s, had a 3,000-mile round-trip flight from Saipan. That distance limited the big airplane to a maximum bomb load of three tons, not the ten-ton load it was designed to carry. It also meant bomb runs to Japan with no fighter support, and that required the aircraft to climb to 28,000 feet, where precision bombing was impossible. There was also no friendly island on which the big bombers could land if they became disabled. From the Marianas to Iwo Jima and back, pilots and crews could expect no help or support. Iwo Jima was the key. In the eyes of both the Americans and the Japanese, it was a vital piece of land.

The evening he landed on the island, Maj. Hone had dinner with Gen. Kuribayashi, and the general discussed Iwo Jima and the upcoming operation. He told the young major that when the enemy came, they could contain them. They would fight a delaying action until the Combined Fleet could come *from* the mainland, or from Okinawa, and unite the American Fleet. "Our role would be a great containing operation," he said while smiling and pouring whiskey for himself and his young guest.

The depth of the official Japanese cover—up of the disasters suffered by the fleet over the years was revealed in Kuribayashi's statement. He knew nothing of the large numbers of Japanese ships at the bottom of the ocean. He did not know of the disaster at Midway, or the more recently crushed Operation A-Go.

But Maj. Hone knew. He had been a staff officer with the Army Shipping Headquarters and had served as a liaison officer between the Army and the Navy, and he had been privy to the vast message traffic that had told the story of the Japanese defeats. Now he looked at Gen. Kuribayashi, who toasted the upcoming glorious battle to defeat the Americans, and swallowed hard.

“General,” he began, “we base no more Combined Fleet in Japan. Some tiny naval forces remain, but there is no more striking power.”

Kuribayashi showed no expression. He listened.

Maj. Hone continued. He revealed the results of Operation A-Go, and details of all the other naval defeats, and concluded by saying, “The death date of Japan was ten days ago. It was June 19, 1944.”

Kuribayashi calmly looked at him and nodded and said, “Then you mean that we must just die at the entrance of Tokyo, don't you?”

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The next morning, Kuribayashi and Maj. Horie went to the southern beaches, and the general lay on the black sand just as if he were an invading soldier. He looked up and down the beach, and then up at Mount Suribachi, and then turned and watched the waves breaking on the shore behind him. “This beach is very wide,” he said. “The airfield is also very wide. The enemy must come here; there is no alternative.”

For the next two hours, the general and the young major drove around the airfield in an old car, making frequent stops. At each stop, Gen. Kuribayashi made Maj. Hone lie down as if he were an enemy soldier. While the major did as the general directed, Kuribayashi observed the lines of fire necessary to stop the enemy. Maj. Horie departed Iwo Jima the next morning and flew back to Chi Chi Jima to begin setting up the shipping and supply operations that would send the men and weapons to Kuribayashi for his Iwo Jima fortress.

Since the Americans bombed the islands in the daytime, Horie's operation was limited to the nighttime. Transports were unloaded, and their cargoes taken by truck into the hills for concealment. The following night, these same trucks would bring the cargo back to

the pier, where it would be reloaded onto sailing and fishing boats. Three thousand men were used in the unloading and reloading, along with thirty trucks and twenty landing craft. Fifty sailing and fishing boats made up the supply fleet, and it took four days from the time the cargo arrived at Chi Chi Jima to make its way to Iwo Jima. Everything was done at night.

It was backbreaking work for the three-thousand-man labor force, and officers often beat the men to move them, but in July and August, Horie was able to send Kuribayashi most of the twenty-one thousand men who would comprise his defensive force—a force the Americans estimated as thirteen thousand.

On August 10. Maj. Horie returned to Iwo Jima to visit Gen. Kuribayashi. Despite the fact that the general was now reconciled that Japan was at its end, he was smiling and busy with building his defense. He had also replaced all of his aged battalion commanders with young officers. He would fight with officers who understood his tactics. The disagreement over his defense-in-depth tactics had resounded throughout his command and even as high as Imperial Headquarters itself but, in the end, he prevailed. He had made a few compromises. A particular compromise was to allow 135 pillboxes to be built on the beach, but that was to get a like number built in his defensive line. In the end, he fired eighteen unyielding senior officers including his chief of staff. If he was to defend the island, his subordinates would do it his way.”

But tactics was not the only problem facing Kuribayashi. Iwo Jima had no water. There were no streams on the island, and the only way to accumulate drinking water was to catch it when it rained. Hundreds of cisterns had been built over the years around Motoyama, but Kuribayashi had to provide water for more than twenty thousand men. He built more cisterns and storage tanks, one holding 10,000 gallons, and issued strict orders that no water would be used for anything other than drinking. Baths were taken with seawater.

The trees that existed were cut down for fortifications, and concrete was poured by the thousands of yards, and the Japanese tunneled like moles. Kuribayashi ordered that all strong points be connected by a tunnel, including one from Motoyama to Suribachi. Fifteen miles of tunneling was ordered.”

Throughout the months of work preparing Iwo Jima as a fortress, Gen. Kuribayashi had pounded his orders for defense into the head of every man under his command over and over. He made it clear that he expected all personnel to construct his fighting position so that it would be impervious to the heavy shelling that would come prior to the invasion, and that he expected that position to also serve as the man’s tomb. There would be no surrender. It would be a fight to the death, and in death, Japan could win in spirit.

His orders were sixfold: to defend the island with an all-out effort to destroy enemy tanks with explosives; to infiltrate and annihilate to kill one enemy with every shot; to not die until each man had killed ten enemy; to harass and conduct guerrilla tactics even with only one soldier remaining. Slowly the Japanese defending forces disappeared underground. The defense was hardened.

From December 8, 1944, until D-Day, February 19, 1945, B-24 bombers attacked the fortress every day, dropping 7,000 tons of bombs. Supplementing this enormous bombardment, naval ships hammered the island with twenty-three thousand rounds from 5-inch and 16-inch guns. Deep inside the island, Kuribayashi's men absorbed this pounding little the worse for wear. Inside Suribachi, the Japanese had built a seven-story defensive structure with 35 feet of overhead cover. Steam, electricity, and water had been piped in, and all entrances in the mountain were angled 90 degrees after the first several feet to protect against flamethrowers. The blast revetments were solid concrete.

In the northern regions, where the main line of defense was set up there were two massive defensive positions near Motoyama and Kitano Point. Kuribayashi's headquarters at Kitano Point had 500 feet of tunnels, some as deep as 75 feet underground. All through the island, thousands of feet of tunnels connected positions, and hundreds of different entrances gave the Japanese excellent mobility and protection.

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Instead of being disheartened, as one might expect of soldiers preparing for a last stand and absorbing a massive daily bombardment, most of the men were in good spirits. They waited for the invasion, and while waiting, like all soldiers, they dreamt of home and wrote letters.

On December 18, Lt.Col. Nishi, who commanded the 26th Tank Regiment, but whose soldiers would fight as infantry because their tanks were at the bottom of the ocean thanks to an American submarine, wrote to his wife: "I sympathize with you," he said, "because it is very cold in Tokyo. . . . This place is like a winter resort. If we stay in our caves we don't feel the cold. . . . We are concentrating our energy in cave digging and expansion of our underground living rooms. Even B-29s can do nothing to these rooms. We are going to dig the land 20 meters deep, and make underground streets."

On the same day, Lt.Col. Nakana, the operations officer, wrote his wife that the enemy air raids were sometimes more than ten a day, but there was no damage. He said that everyone was vigorous and begged her not to worry. He was very upbeat: "Now we have saved enough water," he wrote. "Yesterday we had a bath. Everyone is happy, and we even get some fish, because whenever the enemy makes air-raids, many fish . . . are killed by the bombs." Little did the Americans realize that their bombardment was, in fact, helping to feed the Japanese forces on Iwo Jima.

"The enemy air-raids come almost every day," Lt.Col. Nakana continued, regaling his wife with the resulting feast from the sea. "If they do not come, we miss them." He concluded, "We are gladly waiting for the enemy."

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In the first week of January, Jay Rebstock, along with the entire 5th Marine Division, mounted out from the Big Island of Hawaii, while the 4th Division embarked from Maui. It would be the 4th Division's fourth major assault and the first action for the newly formed, but veteran-laden 5th Division.

The 3rd Marine Division would round out the attack force and would be the reserve division. This three-division Marine force was the largest ever committed to a single battle in the history of the Corps. It would bear the title of V Amphibious Corps or VAC.

As Rebstock and his fellow Marines boarded the troop transports, they still thought that their target was either China or Formosa and the scuttlebutt was that those targets would be just a warm-up for the real destination, which was the island of Okinawa. They knew nothing of the plan called Operation Detachment, which had been issued on December 23 and which called for a direct frontal assault on the 3,000 yards of black, sandy beaches on the east coast in the shadow of Mount Suribachi. The 5th Division would assault the left of the beaches and the 4th would assault the right.

The naval force, with which they would rendezvous, was enormous. For the Guadalcanal veterans, the amount of materiel and ships was staggering in comparison to the few ships and supplies available to them in 1942. The force of the U.S. Fifth Fleet consisted of 485 ships including twelve aircraft carriers. The combined strength of VAC was more than seventy thousand men, and the 5th Division alone was going in with over a hundred million cigarettes.

Onboard the APAs, Marines geared up for battle. Weapons were cleaned and recleaned, knives were sharpened and resharpened. Rebstock loaded machine-gun belts and magazines for his Browning automatic rifle. The ammunition was packaged loose in crates, and he spent hours belting it. Down belowdeck, they slept five high in cramped quarters and, during the day, there was nothing to see but the endless ocean.

About one week out of Hawaii, Rebstock's company commander called his Marines together and informed them that their target was the island of Iwo Jima. The Marines of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 27th Marines, looked at each other with puzzled stares. The captain uncovered a map on the bulkhead, revealing a diagram of the pork-chop-shaped island, and pointed to the eastern beaches, which were labeled: Green Beach, Red 1 and 2, Yellow 1 and 2, and Blue 1 and 2.

"We'll be landing on Red Beach 1," the officer said, holding his pointer on the second invasion beach north of Mount Suribachi. "Company E will be in the second wave," he said, but it was, in fact, the first infantry wave, since the first wave would be armored LVT (A)s to provide fire support with their 75mm guns.

When the convoy got to Saipan, Rebstock and Company E loaded onto LSTs. They made a practice run on February 12 and, for the final time, the Marines loaded onto their amtracs, rolled out of the LST tank decks, and circled in the water. Then there was the final run to the beach, with the Higgins boats bobbing in on later waves. When they got close to the Saipan beaches, the craft turned and went back to the ships. It was a practice of coordination to land the landing force. There was no need for the Marines to disembark and hit the beach. They had all done it countless times, and knew what to do: attack. Attack and pin the enemy down. Bypass when possible and let the later waves mop up. Push, push, push. It was the tactics of unrelenting pressure, and from the first attack at Tarawa, the Marines had perfected it.

Back on the LSTs, Rebstock found a place to sleep on the deck rather than being confined in the lower quarters of the ship. It was cooler at night, and the fresh air felt good.

Briefings were held every day. Maps and models of the island were available for each man to see. They examined the terrain models and pointed to the beaches where they would land. Some squatted down to get an idea of the elevation. All eyes focused on Mount Suribachi, and it was Mount Suribachi that had to be taken.

The company and platoon commanders kept the troops up to date, and the word was encouraging. Intelligence had concluded that since Iwo Jima had no water supply, the most that the rainfall could support was thirteen thousand men.

As the Marines circled around and sat on deck for these briefings, they were more convinced that Iwo Jima would be the rehearsal for the big push at Okinawa. These thirteen thousand Japs had to be sick and disoriented by the isolation on the island, and the constant pounding of the last seventy days would make them a less than effective fighting force. It would last maybe five days, and once Suribachi was taken, it would be over.

In the evening, PFC Rebstock and his friends listened to Tokyo Rose tell them that the Imperial Japanese forces were waiting for them on Iwo. The music was good, they thought, even though her propaganda was bad.

The final briefings, as they approached the battle area, included estimates of the length of the battle. No more than three to five days, the young BARMAN heard, and even less if the Nips made their usual banzai charge for the emperor, allowing the Marines to cut them down.

And then they were given the passwords: state capitals and presidents. These were not easy. Had they been baseball and automobiles, the Marines would have had no trouble, but most of the men didn't know the capitals and were stumped past Washington and

Roosevelt. They would have to study these passwords. Franklin Roosevelt was the only president these nineteen- and twenty-year-olds had ever known.

As the transports arrived at the assembly areas, the Marines were on deck, transfixed by the spectacular display of the power of the shore bombardment. Even at night, they watched the orange flashes and explosions of what many thought was the greatest Fourth of July fireworks that they could ever see.

That night, February 18, the night before D-day, sleep was almost impossible. Weapons were checked for the thousandth time, and although there were religious services on board, the attendance was light. Some letters were written, but mostly the time was spent just checking everything over.

The landing force was called to chow at 0300. The Marines formed in their interminable lines to be fed. It was steak and eggs in the galley, standing up. Some couldn't eat. Others ate as if there was no tomorrow, scooping up the untouched plates of those who couldn't. Rebstock ate in the crowded galley where the only sound was of metal utensils on metal trays. There was little talking.

Small-unit leaders went around and give final instructions. Each man was given something extra to carry in. Jay Rebstock was handed a 5-gallon can of water to carry in and drop on the beach. Others were given extra ammunition, or explosives, or mines and it was all tucked away with packs and rifles.

For the marines of the 2nd Platoon, there would be no disembarking over the side and down a cargo net in Higgins boats. They would ride their LVTs out the bow of the LST, and down the ramp into the water.

At 0630, everything was in position, and the thunderous roar of the shore bombardment began. It was a meticulous bombardment plan, with each vessel given exact targets to hit with an exact number of shells at an exact time. What looked to the observing Marines as the ships firing at will was the execution of the detailed bombardment plan.

The island was swept yard by yard with a rain of steel. Five battleships pounded Iwo from the east coast while two other battleships steamed to the west coast and smashed it from there. For almost an hour and a half, the battleships poured more than five hundred rounds onto their targets. The cruisers chipped away with seven hundred.

As the bombardment shrouded Iwo Jima in clouds of dust so thick that it was obscured, the landing force was debarked. Rebstock and his members of the 2nd Platoon of Easy Company were called to the tank deck of the LST to board their LVTs. He hustled down to the tank deck with his heavy pack and a 5-gallon can of water. Other Marines scrambled over the steel decks, loading their gear and

other materiel, and the drivers started the vehicles. The noise in the closed hull was deafening, and blue exhaust from the engines filled the compartment.

PFC Rebstock thought he would be asphyxiated before he ever got in to Japs. He held a cloth in front of his face, and then everyone put on their gasmasks, but the masks were designed for filtering, not for creating fresh air. For thirty minutes, they sat in their veritable execution chamber, cough and gagging, eyes blinded by fumes.

Finally, the big steel doors in the LST's bow began to open, and the blue haze and fumes were dissipated by the sudden rush of fresh air, bringing relief to tortured lungs and eyes. The sunlight of a beautiful day streamed into the cavernous hold as the first tractor creaked toward the inclined deck leading to the lapping, blue water. Like a great hippo, the ungainly tractor waddled down the ramp and went in nose first. Its steel tracks ground on the steel ramp until it plunged in and bobbed up, righting itself in the light seas. It churned away as the next tractor followed, and then the next, and it was now time for the 2nd Platoon to enter the water.

Rebstock and the other fifteen Marines felt the vehicle dip down the ramp, and suddenly they were floating and crawling off to join the other launched tractors and they circled in a great rendezvous.

The air was crisp, and the sun was clear and bright. Rebstock looked all around and remembered all the small American flags flying from every tractor. The explosions from the great guns of the battleships and cruisers were hardly audible over the noise of the amtracs. The concussions and the great orange flashes as the ships shelled the island brought smiles to the faces of the circling Marines. They watched as the island seemed to literally explode. This would be over soon they thought: When Suribachi falls, it's over.

A few minutes past 0800, the naval gunfire stopped. The amtracs churned toward the line of departure and, as they passed the Navy ships, sailors waved and yelled encouragement to the passing Marines. Nothing could be heard above the roar of the tractor engines, but the Marines gave the thumbs-up.

As the 2nd Platoon tractor reached the line, 120 carrier-launched aircraft roared overhead to further bomb the island. The Marines cheered, as they saw forty-eight of the aircraft were Marine planes. They watched the squadrons drop their high explosives and napalm on the slopes of Suribachi and on the Motoyama airfields.

The embarked Marines watched the planes hammer the beaches that they would soon invade. Napalm, rockets, and strafing chewed the area until it seemed that no one could be left. The Marines cheered and slapped on another, happy not to be defending the beach

against such an awesome display of firepower. For twenty minutes, they watched the grand spectacle, and as the planes flew away, the navy bombardment started again. This time every gun concentrated on the beaches.

Rebstock was at the line of departure, and the first wave of armored support tractors with their 75mm guns started in, as if they were in the front rank of a parade, small American flags snapping from antennas.

It was 0830, and five minutes later, the first wave of infantry formed their lined and followed the LVT (A)s toward the beaches. Second Platoon Marines could see the sterns of the preceding tractors in front of them and, as they looked over the gunwales of their own craft, they could see adjacent units churning forward with them. Their destination was Red 1, and they marched onward under the greatest cannonade of naval gunfire that they could ever imagine. The only thing missing from this colossal parade was the brass band, and for the thirty minutes that it would take for the run to the beach, the American ships salvoed more than eight thousand rounds of fire, completely obliterating Japanese Kuribayashi's reluctantly built beach defenses.

In the 2nd Platoon tractor, the Marines looked over the sides. Rebstock held onto his 5-gallon water can, and watched as some waves broke over the gunwales and splashed onto the deck. Despite the relatively calm seas, some of the men were seasick. The motion and the thirty minutes in the buttoned-up deck of the LST, with those terrible fumes, was now taking their toll.

The tractors approached the beach like giant water bugs. Rebstock observed splashes in the water. He assumed the Navy had fired some short rounds. Then there were more splashes, and suddenly an exploding LVT. Men were screaming in the water, and heads ducked below the gunwales with the realization that these were not short rounds. The recent smiling and backslapping and atmosphere of a grand parade was now gone, replaced with the deadly seriousness of men under fire.

It was 200 yards from the beach. Rebstock sneaked a peek over the side, and he could see that the armored tractors were not on the beach; in fact, they had backed down and were firing their guns from the water. Rebstock's LVT churned past the firing LVT (A)s.

What the hell is going on, he thought. He looked out again and, to his amazement, he could see the top of a beach-defending gun firing at the aircraft that were strafing the beach. He could only see the top of the gun and the top of a helmet as the gun slewed around from its position atop the second terrace.

The tracks ground on the sand as his LVT landed and lurched up a slope, but then ground to a halt as the tracks continued to turn and cut a rove in the soft soil. "Over the side," was the order. The Marines jumped onto the black sand.

Rebstock moved forward past the grinding vehicle, but his feet moved as if they were in slow motion. He struggled up the first terrace weighted down with his enormous combat load and dragging his 5-gallon water can. He was not even aware that he had not dropped the cumbersome can because his eyes were set on the 5 feet of gun barrel that now was directly in front of him on the second terrace. It was 20 feet away, and again he caught glimpses of the tops of some helmets. The gun continued to fire at the low-flying planes.

The young PFC crouched low and tried to move forward, but his feet sank into the sand up to his knees. He cursed; the forty-day ship ride to get here, which seemed to have left him out of shape and wheezing for air. He felt like a salmon trying to swim upstream. As he alternately struggled up and slid down the terrace, Rebstock chanced a look down and was horrified to see that he was still lugging the water can. His hand opened as if he had grabbed a hot iron, half kicked the offending can away.

He also, now, ditched some of his gear. His load was so heavy he could hardly move. In addition to his heavy weapon, he had 240 rounds of ammo, plus an extra bandoleer slung around his chest, as well as grenades, an entrenching tool, canteens of water, a bipod for the BAR, and a .45 pistol. It did not take him long to send the bipod and the pistol to join the 5-gallon water can on the beach.

When next he looked up, some of his squad had surmounted the terraces that led up from the beach, had jumped into the gun pit with the Japanese gunners, and were clubbing them to death. With his lighter load, Rebstock struggled up the second terrace and ran into his assistant BARMAN, who like him, was carrying an extra load and who was equally anxious to lighten his load. When he saw Rebstock, he threw his extra load of ammunition to him and said, "The BAR is your weapon, so you can carry your own ammo!" With that he was off at a half lope across the flatter land.

The 2nd Platoon suddenly found itself up the terraces and free to move forward. "Go, go, go," the NCOs shouted, and they moved forward in a half crouch. Rebstock moved forward with his weapon at the hip. He could hear sporadic firing, and a puff of dust occasionally erupted in front of him, but the going was pretty easy.

They moved across the neck of land joining Mount Suribachi to the rest of the island, constantly casting wary eyes up the forbidding slopes, expecting a hail of fire to rain down on them at any moment. But Suribachi let them pass.

They came across a big blockhouse, which held them up momentarily, but they were able to bypass it and continue on toward the western coast. As they approached a small sugar cane field that had remarkably withstood the bombardment, Rebstock watched in amazement as a Japanese soldier charged toward him. It was almost unreal, as if in a dream, and it took him a moment before he leveled his weapon at the charging figure to knock him down with a short burst. Lt. Kellogg came up and screamed at the panting BARMAN that he thought he had killed a fellow Marine. Rebstock was horrified, but not for long, as a fellow Marine presented him with the insignia that he had cut off the fallen soldier's shirt. He had been a Japanese Marine.

Again, they pushed on. By early afternoon they reached the opposite side of the island, which was solid rocks and cliffs. They stopped and took up defensive positions and counted their casualties. It was not too bad. Easy Company had lost its company commander and had six other men killed and nine wounded, but they had cut a wide path across the island, isolating Suribachi from the northern reaches. The company took up defensive positions and evacuated their wounded. They were ready for orders to swing to the north, but those orders did not come, and would not come, at least on this day.

In fact, within an hour of being evacuated, most of the wounded men were back, saying it was safer in the lines than on the beaches. The beaches were catching hell.

As Rebstock's 2nd Platoon scurried across the island between 0905 and 1000, Gen. Kuribayashi's gunners were underground, protected from the shelling. As the fire lifted, they came out, and in the hills to the north, they swung their gun barrels to prepare for action.

The third and fourth waves landed behind the 2nd Platoon, dumping twenty-eight hundred more men on the beach. They too began their ascent up the double and triple terraces to reach the flat land and the airfield. An increase of small-arms fire was detected. Marines that had landed to the left of Rebstock and the 2nd Platoon on Green Beach headed for the base of Suribachi.

The invasion was thirty minutes old and progress was good. But in the hills, hand wheels spun, setting elevating and traversing data on hundreds of guns. The data had been memorized for months, and gunners easily slewed the barrels to the proper attitudes.

A quick pull of a handle by an artilleryman opened the breech, rounds were rammed home, and the blocks slammed shut. One by one, the gun crews signaled "up." The northern defense force waited only for the order to fire. Not one inch of the landing beach would be exempt from the imminent bombardment.

From their positions on the high ground, the Japanese could see small clusters of Marines move forward and then stop while other groups moved. It was like watching a game of leapfrog. The anxious artillerymen watched the tempting targets moving before them and were itching to fire, but the orders were firm. The commanding general would give the order to fire, and until he did, the defense would remain silent.

At a few minutes past 1000, as the landing Marines, now packed on the beaches, struggled to overcome the damnable, sliding terraces, Gen. Kuribayashi gave that order.

The roar was as deafening as it was frightening. Artillery and mortars, along with big coastal guns and anti-aircraft guns with barrels deflected for direct fire, unleashed a terrifying volley. The beaches were pulverized with every conceivable type of fire, and the raining shells swept back and forth across the landing beaches like a giant scythe. Marines were crushed, and landing craft on the beaches exploded. Craft and vehicles and close to the beach were instantly destroyed. Men from the first waves, already wounded and awaiting rescue, were now annihilated along with the medical personnel attending them.

Kuribayashi's bombardment came from more than one hundred guns with a caliber of at least 6 inches, and more than three hundred guns that were more than 3 inches. Supplementing this formidable bombardment force were another three hundred assorted howitzers, self-propelled guns, tank and antitank guns. Kuribayashi also had a special weapon with which to punish the invading marines: the colossal 320mm (13 inches) Spigot mortar, which some Marines would come to call the "screaming Jesus." This monster mortar was the pride of the Japanese 29th Independent Mortar Battalion, and its 675-pound round had a range of more than 1,400 yards.

Kuribayashi's order to fire brought this massive cannonade to bear on the 3,000 yards of landing beaches, and the slaughter was indescribable. A veteran Marine correspondent said, "At Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian, I saw Marines killed and wounded in a shocking manner, but I saw nothing like the ghastliness that hung over the Iwo Jima beachhead."

In the hills, the Japanese fired with the fury and vengeance of men who had been pinned and bombed for more than seventy consecutive days. They fired as fast as they could at the targets of packed Marines and equipment on the beach.

Second Lieutenant Nakamura, who commanded the 12th Independent Anti-Tank Gun Battalion, was everywhere directing fire, and his gunners took a heavy toll. Twenty vehicles and tanks were destroyed under his onslaught, and Gen. Kuribayashi had already telegraphed Tokyo of the lieutenant's feats when naval gunfire finally pinpointed his position and killed him. He had more than fulfilled his ten-for-one pledge to his general, and Kuribayashi posthumously promoted him to the rank of captain. The general cited others, including the entire 145th Infantry Regiment, and then gave orders to collect all the money in the possession of his entire force to send back to the National Treasury. For Kuribayashi and his men, the sacrifice would be total.

On the beaches, the Marines still scrambled ashore, and each was of men faced the terrace climb. To the right of Red 1, Baker Company landed on Red 2. They did not have the immediate success of scaling the terraces as had Easy Company, and when Gen. Kuribayashi ordered his bombardment, Baker Company was pinned down.

Marines dug into the soft black sand to try to escape the rain of steel. One machine gunner, PFC Tatum, dug furiously as he watched the world erupt around him. He felt every concussion vibrate through the sand and chanced a look at the beach. Everybody was down as the fire swept over them, except one solitary figure who walked among the prone figures shouting and cursing everyone to get

moving off the beach. He was impervious to the falling shells that impacted all around him. As he got closer, Tatum recognized this Marine as the legendary Medal of Honor winner John Basilone. An officer had joined him, and the two men were the only leaders trying to get the pinned-down Marines moving. As Tatum buried his face in the sand, he felt a smack on his helmet and looked up to see Basilone pointing through smoke and erupting sand to a target. He was pointing to a large bunker, and he wanted Tatum to fire on it.

Basilone got the Marines moving. Tatum's gun hammered at the aperture, forcing the enemy away from the opening. His next bursts forced the soldiers in the bunker to close the metal door. Then Basilone directed a demo man to blow the door, and after the explosion, followed with a flamethrower that incinerated the Japanese inside. The screaming survivors, on fire from the napalm, rushed out the back, only to be cut down by the Basilone-led group.

With Basilone as their leader, this group left the beach and pushed up the terraces and toward the edge of the airstrip, which looked more like a junkyard for wrecked aircraft. Up and down the beach, small groups slowly moved forward, pushed into action by leaders such as Basilone, but the Japanese fire did not diminish in ferocity. Marines fell by the hundreds. Manila John Basilone's luck finally ran out, and he too went down in a hail of mortar fire.

As evening approached, the Marines dug in where they were. On the west coast, Easy Company prepared for the inevitable banzai counterattack, which had become a predictable Japanese tactic. Jay Rebstock occupied a fighting hole with four other Marines, and he trained his BAR toward the north, envisioning the coming screaming charge. He wondered if he would be able to fire fast enough to beat back the enemy.

Darkness came at 1845, and the night turned cold. Marines shivered in their holes, straining their eyes forward. The Japanese bombardment continued without letup. Each slackening of fire was followed by an increase in intensity.

At command posts all along the tight perimeter, commanders added up their casualties. The numbers were bigger than the whole Guadalcanal operation. Six hundred Marines were dead and almost two thousand wounded, and it was only the first day.

The reports flashed back to headquarters in Guam, and then to Pearl Harbor, and finally to Washington. President Franklin Roosevelt was seated at his desk when the figures came in. He had just returned from the Yalta Conference with Churchill and Stalin, and the president looked frail and stooped. An aide reported the Iwo Jima casualties to him, and those in the room heard the exhausted president gasp with horror. In all the years of the war and his presidency, no one could ever recall seeing that reaction from Franklin Roosevelt, even during the darkest days after Pearl Harbor.

* * *

The night banzai charge never came, as Gen. Kuribayashi forbade any such meaningless charges, which, he concluded only played into American hands. Instead, he pounded the invading force with ceaseless incoming and waited for the invaders to come to him, where he could bleed them white.

War correspondent Robert Sherrod surveyed the scene of the invasions beaches with the first light of the new day of D+1. He wrote in his dispatch back to the United States, "The first night on Iwo Jima can only be described as a nightmare in hell." Speaking of the dead, whose bodies lay strewn on the beach, he said, "They died with the greatest possible violence....Legs and arms lay 50 feet away from the body."

The first night had produced the first difficulties with the passwords for the jittery invasion force, who challenged everything that moved. One anxious guard at the beach challenged a figure in the dark by calling out one president's name, expecting another in return. The answer came back, "Fillmore," not exactly a household name. The guard hated wiseguys, and shouted back, "All right, you son of a bitch. One more like that and you're dead."

On the west coast, Company E prepared to attack to the north on D+1, but as they advanced, their positions were pounded by Japanese artillery and mortars. All Rebstock and the men from 2nd Platoon could do was advance and then burrow in the ground, but the unseen enemy continued to inflict horrific casualties on the marines. Except for the one enemy soldier that Rebstock had seen and killed on D-Day, and the anti-aircraft defenders at the water's edge as they landed, no one had seen any enemy at which to fire. Yet the enemy could see them, and Company E was being drained. In the attack on D+1, as the 26th and 27th Marines advanced, there were six hundred casualties. On February 21, D+2, Company E lost their second company commander.

The attack on the west coast became an attack of prep fires in the morning, followed by the assault, and then a return to previous positions to count casualties. On February 22, D+3, as the entire 5th Division tried to attack forward, ten officers were killed. Ten had been killed the day before, and in four days of combat, thirty-five officers of the division had been lost. The west coast, like the rest of the island, had become one giant killing field.

Rebstock and the members of the 2nd Platoon prepared for yet another attack on February 23. Suddenly wild cheering was heard across the front, and ships' horns and whistles could be heard from the sea. "The flag's up," someone said, and all eyes turned to Suribachi. There it was. The Stars and Stripes beating stiffly in the wind. The men of Company E lent their voices to the cheering and hollering.

Rebstock felt tears well in his eyes, and he was bursting with pride. Best of all, he knew that the battle must be close to being over. He'd remembered the briefing onboard ship where the end of the battle had been predicted in three to five days with the fall of Mount Suribachi. Well, he thought, this is the fifth day and the flag flies atop the mountain. The end is in sight.

But the battle was not over, or even close to being over. In fact, it was only the beginning, and once the euphoria of the flag raising on Suribachi had passed, the battle went back to being a contest of attrition. A few days after the flag raising, the world would be presented with the most famous picture of World War II: Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal had snapped the perfectly framed exposure of five Marines and one Navy corpsman raising a second, larger flag on top of Suribachi. Emblematic of the ferocity of the fight for Iwo Jima, three of the six flag-raisers would not make it off the island alive.

Remarkably, a color motion picture film of the historic flag-raising was also made by Marine Sgt. William Genaust. He panned his camera as the flag went up and continued as the flag-raisers secured Old Glory into the ground. Genaust would be killed several days later.

* * *

The following day, February 24, Company E, with the rest of the 2nd Battalion, moved in an area along the western coast that would be known as Death Valley. The attack began in the morning and it was strictly by the book: lay down a base of fire, bring up demolitions and the flamethrower, and destroy the position; move to the next bunker and repeat all the steps.

The attack pushed along the west coast, which was one series of pillboxes after another. To the left, the Marines could see the peaceful waves breaking on the sandy beaches, and many fantasized about what a marvelous spot it would be to spend a lazy afternoon. To the front was one ridgeline after another, and the never-ending Japanese artillery and mortar fire.

Rebstock fired his BAR at the first strongpoint he could see. The weapon bucked in his shoulder as he poured fire into what looked like an aperture. Other Marines attacked the flanks of the positions, and then the flame man was down before he could reach the pillbox. Another took his place, and he too went down. Rebstock increased the volume of fire at the position, cursing the bastards that he could never see. A third man retrieved the flamethrower and soon there was a familiar *whoosh* and the telltale orange tongue of fire spitting into the rocky seams, and he too went down. Life expectancy of the flamethrower man was short; he was a prime target for every Japanese soldier who could see him.

The squad rushed forward, past the neutralized position, only to be pinned down again from the relentless small-arms fire. Rebstock could see nothing, but fired in the direction that his comrades pointed. They attacked throughout the day, and dug in for the night.

On the twenty-fifth, the officers decided to try a different strategy. Instead of the preparatory fires, which drove the Japs underground but also announced the beginning of a ground attack, they would attack in the afternoon, without the prep fires, hoping to catch the Japanese off guard.

Death Valley was a deep indentation like a stadium field, with high ridgelines surrounding the field. The attack would carry down the slope into the valley, and then up to seize the ridgeline that guarded against further northern movement. The whole attack down into the valley and up the other side could be seen by the enemy, but there was no other way.

As the jump-off hour approached, Rebstock and his fellow Marines of the 2nd Platoon checked their weapons again and again. Each man knew that this attack would expose him to the full force of the firepower of the entrenched defenders who held the high ground.

At 1500 the attacking force stood up and began to advance, but Rebstock's feet were frozen in place, and an unquenchable thirst suddenly overtook him. "I guess that is what's called being scared shitless," he recalled. "I could not move, and I drank almost an entire canteen of water, and only then did my legs move forward."

They moved no more than 50 yards before the whole world exploded on them. Everyone dived for cover, and Rebstock and his squad leader jumped into a hole with two other men. As one of the men looked up to see who their new companions were, a Japanese bullet hit him directly in the middle of his forehead, and he slumped over dead. The second man had a bullet pierce his helmet, deflect between the helmet and the liner, and come out on the other side.

Rebstock and his squad leader lay in a fetal position in the hole with the dead and wounded men, and the Japanese incoming thundered all around them. The ground shook, and rocks buried the huddled Marines. Just when they thought nothing could be worse, the first airburst artillery detonated above them, hurling deadly steel fragments down from above.

Rebstock could not move. Like a worm trying to dig deeper, he flattened himself into the hole. He remained pinned there until, finally, he heard the familiar clanking of friendly tanks arriving on the scene. An ear splitting *crack* signaled the fire of a Sherman, just to the side of him. He crawled to the edge of the hole and began laying down fire with his BAR and sent a stream of fire marked with red tracers into the terrain to his front. As the smoke cleared he could see a new bunker and what looked like an aperture. Again, the BAR went to his shoulder, and rounds poured into the slit. Marines inched and crawled forward toward the bunker. Rebstock changed magazines and bore down on the opening.

To his right, a similar scene unfolded. PFC Leonard Nederveld, in the adjacent platoon, moved forward and flipped a white phosphorus grenade into another opening. The soft explosion of the phosphorus was what the Marines expected, and they kept their

eyes glued for a Japanese defender who would try to run out, but the explosion was anything but soft. Instead, a gigantic, deafening explosion sent out an enormous shock wave, obliterated the bunker and clouded the battlefield. Rebstock was thrown to the ground, and his BAR shot from his hands as if it were a toy. The other Marines in the area were flattened to the ground like knocked-out fighters. The explosion seemed to echo over and over, and Rebstock could only hear a ringing in his ears. The pillbox had, in fact, been an ammo dump.

The young PFC staggered to his feet, dazed and disoriented, and looked for his weapon. For the second time in a few seconds, he was thrown down again by a force as mighty as that of the exploding dump. A Sherman tank erupted in a ball of fire and smoke as a Japanese artillery shell found its target.

The tank continued to explode as its munitions cooked off and was joined by more exploding ammunition from the pillbox. After long minutes, the roar from the two near-simultaneous detonations ebbed, and the area was engulfed in silence. It was as if the ferocity and savagery of the battle had reached its zenith, and now collapsed under its own weight. What moments before had been the roar and fire from some separate chamber in hell was now eerie silence.

Stunned Marines picked themselves off the ground and made hesitant steps, first in one direction and then another. Rebstock twisted around looking for his weapon and cradled the damaged piece in his arms. Instinctively, he found another from a fallen comrade, and smashed the first one on a large boulder, swinging it by the barrel.

Other Marines appeared as figures in a dream in the settling dust and smoke. Someone passed word to return to the original lines, and the battered Marines limped back, dragging wounded buddies with them as best they could. The whole attack had not lasted long, and the company added sixteen more casualties to its ever-growing list.

That night was made longer by an unforgiving cold rain that beat down on the 2nd Platoon. They shivered in their holes and cursed the island of Iwo Jima. The misery of the weather was topped by a renewed Japanese bombardment, making sleep impossible for the exhausted Marines. The next morning, with the rain continuing in a steady beat, the order was passed for the men to stay in their holes. Ammo would be reissued, and replacements would be sent to the platoon.

All day, the platoon traded fire with the relentless enemy. At 1630, the Marine next to Rebstock nudged him and warned that a Japanese soldier was crawling in on him. Through squinted eyes, Rebstock picked out a crawling figure, 50 yards in front of him. As he crawled, the man raised his hand, and then continued to crawl. He alternately crawled, and stopped to raise his hand. The Marines in the line watched this agonizing, snaillike movement.

Rebstock sighted in on him. "Don't shoot him," his buddies said. "Let him get close before you do." Rebstock held his fire.

As the crawling man got close, someone recognized that this was not a Jap at all, but a Marine. Two men ran out and dragged the gray, dust-covered figure into a hole. He was all shot up, his leg was hanging on by a thread, and he was unrecognizable. Encrusted dust and sand were caked on his face, pasted there by an undercoat of blood. Rebstock stared at him, and then thought he recognized the man the man from another company, Watson.

The corpsmen patched him up as best they could, and then made a makeshift stretcher and attempted to evacuate him to the rear, but as they picked the wounded man up, the Japanese opened up on the rescue party. The stretcher crashed to the ground as the carriers dived for cover. The wounded man screamed as he hit the ground, and the shells exploded around him. Finally, someone pulled him into a hole, and Jay Rebstock leaned over to comfort him.

"You'll be okay, Watson," he said and patted the man on the shoulder. Another Marine asked, "Why are you calling him Watson? That's not Watson," he informed Rebstock. "That's Nederveld." Rebstock took a closer look, and, unbelievably, it was the man who had dropped the grenade in the bunker and detonated the massive explosion the day before. He had survived and had spent twenty-four hours in the Japanese lines.

Company E did not attack forward again. With its depleted numbers, they were pulled off the line and, mercifully, sent to the rear for what was to be a form of R&R. The word was that they were through at the front. They would not be put back into the line. The rest area turned out to be anything but R&R. On their first evening back, the Japanese hit the 5th Division ammo dump, which erupted in a spectacular explosion that continued to explode throughout the night.

When daylight came, Rebstock was treated to the sight of a mass burial of his deceased 5th Division comrades. A bulldozer cut out a huge swath of black, volcanic earth. One by one, bodies were laid side-by-side, until the bottom of the trench was filled. Some of the bodies consisted only of an arm or a leg, or some other body parts. Each position was surveyed and recorded in a log, and each body was covered with a thin layer of earth, delicately spread by a fellow comrade. Then the trench was filled by the bulldozer, and markers set up over each body.

After that sobering sight, Company E began its first day in the rest area and took up their new duty. In addition to their regular weapons and gear, each man was issued satchel charges, and they went to the mountain. They were assigned to clean the Japanese out of the caves on Suribachi. For six days, they rooted and burned the remaining force on tree thousand Japanese defenders out or sealed them forever in the mountain.

“R&R,” Rebstock noted, “was killing more Japs!”

* * *

The promise that Company E would not go back into the line was broken on March 4, the fourteenth day of the five-day battle, and the ninth day after the flag-raising on the mountain. When they returned to the line, it had moved all the way to the northern end of the island, and Rebstock could see the ocean over the northern shore from an elevation of 300 feet.

He was in an area around Kitano Point, and the attack resumed just as it had before R&R at Suribachi: attack, attack, and attack. But Company E was not the same company as it had been when it landed. In numbers, it was the equivalent of a good platoon, and half of the people were new and unfamiliar. The casualty ration among these new men was horrific; without experience, they fell at an alarming rate.

Jay Rebstock decided to get behind a veteran who was good and knew the ropes during the attacks. It was the only way to survive, and as the battle seemed to be drawing to an end, everyone was thinking about the possibility of being the last man killed. At night, the Marines dug in, and anyone out of his hole was the enemy.

From March 4 to March 11, Company E attacked against the final Japanese defenses. Rebstock got his first view of a Zippo tank. The fire-breathing armored machines could sustain a long stream of flaming napalm for over a minute, and as new holes and bunkers were discovered, the Zippo went into action. The Japanese were immolated in their defensive positions, and the few who charged were immediately dropped by the waiting Marines. With each step, the Japanese became more frantic. They dropped mortar as if there was an unending supply. At night, the Japanese soldiers infiltrated, looking for food and water, and crawled into the lines stabbing many Marines.

On one of the last days of battle, 2nd Platoon had moved to the final ridgeline, and as they stared down into the canyon below, they could see that the rocky precipice on the other side looked down into the water: The end of the island was at hand. A Marine descended into the canyon. As he approached the bottom, a shot rang out and he slumped in his tracks, dead from a sniper's bullet. One solitary Japanese soldier came out, waving his hands, but the infuriated Marines on the high ground cut him down. Then a second Japanese soldier came out with something in his hands, and some of the Marines said to hold fire and see what this guy was up to. But a nervous shot was fired and that triggered fire from all the jumpy Marines on the ridge.

Still a third soldier appeared in the bottom of the canyon, and again someone shouted, "Hold your fire," but again, after a pause, another shot was fired, and the reaction shooting began again.

Rebstock put his weapon down. He could kill no more. Other Marines did the same, and finally it was silent.

On March 27, Rebstock and the remnants of his company were back at their starting point on the west coast in the shadow of Mount Suribachi. Just before first light, there was tremendous shooting in the area of the Moyoyama airfield. It lasted more than an hour, and as the sun broke into a clear sky, an LST nudged into the shore to take the exhausted Marines off the island.

The word came out that the shooting had been the final banzai charge by the last of the Japanese force: Three hundred Japanese attacked, killing almost one hundred men in tents and dying to the man.

As the ship sailed from Iwo, the survivors could not believe they had made it. Everyone prayed. On the ride back toward Hawaii, there were a number of burials at sea, as some of the wounded succumbed.

As the ship finally approached Pearl Harbor, all of Company E had gathered in front of the pilot house. They anxiously awaited to pass through the submarine gates at the entrance. A photographer came to them and told them to line up for a company photograph. The grim Marines sat in three rows and posed for the picture, and just as the photographer snapped the picture, the loudspeaker came on, and a voice announced that President Franklin Roosevelt had just died.

Rebstock and the assembled men broke down and cried. He was the only president they had ever known, and now he was gone, without seeing the end of the war to which that had just sacrificed so much. They entered Pearl Harbor, where the war had started, and where it would end for them.

EPILOGUE

Rebstock and the rest of the Iwo survivors were reequipped and sent to new training in preparation for the invasion of Japan. They were in the field on maneuvers when the word was passed that the United States had dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima.

Within day, their company was hustled out of Hawaii and loaded on ship, put to sea, headed for Japan. Three days out of Pearl Harbor, in the evening, as the ship sailed under blackout, the lights suddenly came on, and the captain announced that the war was over. Iwo Jima would be the only battle for Jay Rebstock and the 5th Marine Division.

The battle of Iwo Jima could more fittingly have been fought in hell. Had that descent into the underworld been possible, its participants could have seen no greater slaughter or horror. Gen. Kuribayashi's defense inflicted almost thirty thousand casualties on

the Marines, with approximately seven thousand killed. Kuribayashi's own force was virtually annihilated, with more than 20,000 killed. Adding to the Marine casualties, and robbing units of leadership, was the slaughter of the officer corps. Fifth Division alone had more than one hundred killed, forty in the first five days. At the end of the long battle, companies fought with PFCs as leaders, and Company E ended the shooting with only one officer from the six that rode in on the LVTs on February 19.

Nor was there a shortage of valor on Iwo Jima. In the four years of war from Pearl Harbor to the Japanese surrender, the Medal of Honor was presented to 353 men in all theaters: twenty-seven were awarded on Iwo Jima, half of them posthumously.

Emblematic of the horrific casualties were the grim statistics offered by 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, which had stormed and captured Suribachi. On February 19, the battalion had gone into action, reinforced with fourteen hundred men. On March 27, as the unit came down from the mountain to board ships, only 177 originals were left, one-third of whom were wounded.

The official records listed the final strength of Jay Rebstock's company as two officers and fifty-six enlisted men from a starting strength of six officers and 235 enlisted. But as Jay counted the faces in the photo taken as Company E waited to enter Pearl Harbor on the day Franklin Roosevelt died, he could count only thirty-one originals. A thirty-second face belonged to the only replacement out of the fifty who escaped Iwo Jima. What happened to all the replacements that were fed in as green troops? "They were green and inexperienced," Rebstock remembered. "They were cannon fodder."

On April 7, 1945, land-based fighters began accompanying the giant B-29 bombers on missions over Japan. The island soon became known as an emergency airfield for crippled bombers, with 186 landing on July 24. By war's end, more than 2,400 B-29s had used the Iwo Jima airfield.

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