

Iwo, and were working on a third. The island was evidently a staging point for flights to the Marianas and Carolinas. After the fall of the Marianas, Iwo became the major outpost for defense of the Empire in that area, and was accordingly strongly fortified. Coast defense, antiaircraft, and mobile artillery were integrated into a defensive system thoroughly covering the island. The naturally strong terrain features were well used, and augmented by blockhouses and pillboxes covering the possible landing beaches. The final result was an exceptionally strong position, and one impossible to outflank. A balanced force of from 13,000 to 14,000 troops, both Army and Navy, made up the garrison.

It was estimated that the Japs would man prepared defenses with approximately half their infantry, and maintain the remainder as a centrally located mobile reserve.

Our scheme of attack was to land with two divisions abreast, cross the narrow part of the island, then swing one regiment to the south to isolate Suribachi and reduce it, while the remainder pivoted on the right flank, then swept northeast to clear the island.

We Begin the Softening Up

After the fall of Saipan it was evident that Iwo would eventually have to be dealt with. Occasional raids on the Marianas were made from there, and

in exchange our forces occasionally bombed the strips on Iwo. Naval bombardments by cruisers and destroyers on December 24 and 27 and again on January 24 destroyed planes and did superficial damage to installations near the airfield, but did no appreciable damage to the ground defenses.

Beginning in early December, the air forces in the Marianas made daily runs on the island, dropping a total of over 5000 tons of bombs in seventy consecutive days. Photo reconnaissance at the end of this period showed more ground defenses than at the beginning.

Apparently the Nips were just letting our bombs dig the holes, then they finished converting them to pillboxes. Air forces reported consistently heavy and accurate flak, a good indication of the resistance to be faced by the landing force.

The Naval Bombardment

On February 16, 1945, preliminary bombardment and minesweeping began. Participating were several of the old battleships, veterans of Pearl Harbor, and now repaying another installment. Poor visibility hampered the naval gunfire to a slight extent, but the minesweeping was successfully completed. The scheduled strike by land-based air was called off on account of weather.

The day before carrier-based air had hit Chicka and Haha in the Bonins, and this day the famous Task Force 58 hit the Tokyo area.

Artillery on Iwo

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In the first 20 days of fighting on Iwo Jima, the 5th Marine Division's field artillery regiment, the 13th Marines, poured 103,776 shells into Jap positions.

The record shows that the 13th Marines' guns were the only ones landed on Iwo Jima on D-day before late afternoon, coming in under conditions considered unsuitable for artillery. "G" Battery, 3rd Battalion, registered its first shot at 1410, five minutes after the first 105-mm howitzer had been unloaded. At 1420 the entire battery was firing after registering on a base point on Suribachi.

The 2nd Battalion, 13th Marines, came in less than an hour later under intense Jap fire, moving up to its selected positions on top of the eastern slope. Two of their guns were left helpless on the scorched beach in blasted amphibious trucks (DUKWs).

The 75-mm Pack Howitzer 1st Battalion started in later in the afternoon, two of its three batteries setting up after dusk under a hail of Jap mortars. The 4th Battalion moved



This 155-howitzer helps pave the way for the drive on the north of Iwo Jima.

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February 17 was bright and clear, and naval bombardment got down to the serious business of destroying Jap installations. Major attention was, of course, given to coast defense guns, and all those located were destroyed or silenced. As the guns were silenced the ships closed in for more accurate work, and were able to do better. Rocket gunboats closed to extremely short ranges, drawing fire from dual purpose and small automatic weapons. The Japs evidently thought this was a landing attempt, and that night Radio Tokyo broadcast the news that a landing had been repulsed.

This day the air strike came in full force, and literally plastered their target area from relatively low altitude. However, and the air experts might bear this in mind, photo interpreters found very little actual damage to installations.

Carrier planes made intermittent strikes throughout the three days of bombardment, paying particular attention to AA guns and defiladed emplacements.

The following day battleships and destroyers stood in to within 1800 yards of the beach and curried the whole area, destroying practically every visible installation. The Nips would restore some of it during the night, and much of the remainder of the island had been barely scratched, but the ships had done the best they could to pave the way. The foot troops always have to finish the job.

its guns in, but didn't fire until the next day.

The night of D-day the 13th Marines gave direct support to the hard-slugging infantry.

Towards Suribachi Yama the 3rd Battalion howitzers poured shell after shell. On the northern front, our 1st and 2nd Battalions threw their weight. Then came the expected — and feared — counterattack. At 0245 the 27th Marines reported that a full battalion of Jap infantry was moving towards its lines. The 1600-pound howitzers of the 1st Battalion took a few seconds to get a bead on the 250-yard front, and then every piece in the outfit burst into angry flames.

According to Lt. Colonel John S. Oldfield, battalion commander, his howitzers fired 1500 rounds of ammunition in one hour and 50 minutes. The 2nd Battalion, under Major Carl W. Hjerpe, supported its sister battalion with more than 600 rounds of 105-mm ammunition. The first large-scale Jap counterattack of this bloody campaign was stopped dead by the howitzers of the 13th Marines.

On the second day, when Jap fire grew more intense and accurate, Colonel Waller brought the full power of his weapons to bear. Despite loss in officers, men, and materiel, the 13th was in full swing.

On the fifth day of the battle, after Suri-

On February 19 the transports carrying the assault troops arrived in the transport area. Ships seemed to cover the whole ocean, from horizon to horizon. If the Japs had mistaken our group of LCIs for the landing force, what a shock this force must have been. More than 800 ships were involved.

The Attack

Pre-H-hour bombardment started with first light and continued to H-hour, at times blanketing the whole landing beach with smoke and dust. Three separate carrier air strikes and one land-based air strike added to the drenching the Nips were receiving.

The weather was clear and the sea calm, a perfect day for a landing. By 0730 the LSTs carrying the first waves were in position and started discharging their LVTs. Waves formed and crossed the line of departure as if on a well-organized rehearsal. As the first wave approached the beach the naval gunfire lifted to the rear areas and continued to blanket Mt. Suribachi and the rough ground to the right of the beach.

The actual landing was not opposed, but resistance developed in about 15 minutes. The Fourth Division reported heavy resistance, the Fifth Division moderate. On both fronts it consisted mostly of mortar and artillery fire, the naval and air bombardment having apparently neutralized the Jap infantry. Biggest obstacle was not the enemy, but the

baichi Yama was secured, the 3rd Battalion, under Lt. Colonel Henry T. Waller, turned its strength to the north.

Using forward observers and aerial observers to spot targets, Jap guns, mortars, fuel and ammunition dumps, pillboxes, caves, machineguns, vehicles, rocket launchers, and counterattacks were destroyed almost daily.

But, even in their "rear" positions the artillery wasn't safe. Up until the twentieth night of the battle Jap fire fell in the 13th Marines' positions. Fire direction centers, set up in blockhouses or other evacuated shelters, continued to direct the firing of howitzers at all hours of the night and day.

Casualties for this Marine field artillery unit were moderate, considering exposed conditions and congestion. Twelve per cent of the officers were either killed or wounded, with 7 per cent of the enlisted personnel on the casualty lists up to the twentieth day. Fourteen of the 24 trained forward observers, the eyes of the artillery, were incapacitated.

The 13th Marines replaced all their weapons destroyed by enemy fire, keeping up to full strength to help other artillery units pave the way for the infantry. At any time every howitzer in the 13th could be brought to bear on any one point on the island.