

# I fought at Iwo — twice!

by Allen M. Barrett

*As the ship rounded Mt. Surabachi, headed east, a shrill whistle blew over the PA system, followed by a few words: "...let us observe one minute of silence for those who are not returning with us."*

**T**he winch hummed steadily as I was lifted from the Marine amphibious "Duck" which had brought me alongside the hospital ship *Samaritan*. Once topside, my stretcher was skillfully pulled on board. A ship's doctor gave a helping hand as his assistants unstrapped me.

"What's your home town, Marine?" When I told him I came from Baltimore, Md., the doctor replied, "Well, take it easy, son. You're as good as home now. Yes sir, you're right back in Baltimore."

But I wasn't back in Baltimore, not by a long shot. No, I was almost halfway around the world at a place called Iwo Jima. A few hours earlier, on 28 February 1945, the tenth day of ferocious fighting against enemy Japanese forces, I had become one of the more than 26,000 casualties the Marines were destined to bear in that climactic battle of the Pacific War. My wound was slight, a Hollywood job, you might say.

My unit, Company B, 1st Battalion, 26th Regiment of the Fifth Marine Division, made an early morning attack against Japanese positions on the extreme western flank of the Marine line across Iwo. We were confronted by steep hills just ahead where the Japanese were firmly entrenched. They could observe our every move, and they resisted fiercely. Their mortars were zeroed in on us. At the height of our attack, one of their 90mm shells landed with a *whump* a few yards behind me and to the left.

I felt a sharp sting beneath my left armpit. When I looked under my arm, I saw blood. The platoon corpsman, Doc Landry, was at my side in an instant. (Doc seemed to be everywhere when we needed him.) He sprinkled the wound with sulphur to prevent infection, then told me to go back to the battalion aid station for further treatment.

I gave some last-minute orders to Spike Donovan, my platoon sergeant, and headed for the rear. Along the way I caught up with a first platoon rifleman who was in bad shape. He was

Pfc Stanley Chatelain, who had a blood-soaked bandage wrapped around his head so that he was unable to see.

A fragment had lodged between his nose and right eye. He had trouble maneuvering over the sandy, uneven terrain. A corpsman was helping him, and between us we managed to get Chatelain to the aid station a few hundred yards behind our front lines.

At the aid station I told Navy Lt Donald McKinnon, our battalion surgeon, that I was in no pain and should return to Company B.

"Maybe so," he said as he examined the wound, "but we don't know how close that fragment is to your heart or lung. We better prepare you for evacuation."

For the first time I became concerned about the wound. It was so tiny and was causing such a minimum amount of discomfort that I really hadn't expected to be gone from the company for more than an hour or so. But if Doc McKinnon wanted to evacuate me, I wasn't going to fight it. Maybe that little fragment in my chest was my ticket to safe passage off that tortured battleground.

After being tagged for evacuation I hopped into a 3/4-ton truck returning to the eastern beaches after delivering supplies to the front. We covered the mile or so from the west coast of Iwo to the eastern beaches in a few minutes. The driver let me out and headed for an ammo dump to take more supplies back to the lines.

I reported to the beachmaster. He said I would be evacuated as soon as one of the vessels already taking wounded Marines to ships offshore returned from another trip. He motioned for me to join a group of 8-10 other wounded Marines also awaiting evacuation.

During our brief wait I had a chance to look around the eastern beaches where my company had landed nine days earlier, 19 February. Things certainly had changed, and for the better.

When our battalion landed at approximately 1430 on D-Day, beach conditions were horren-

dous. Wrecked landing craft, smashed vehicles and littered equipment were strewn across the entire two and a half-mile length of Futatsune Beach, making things almost impossible for shore parties and landing units. Accurate Japanese fire and Iwo's infamous volcanic ash created this wreckage, which for a time on D-Day caused the beaches to be closed. Now, however, the area resembled a giant arsenal. Most of the D-Day debris had been cleared. Obviously the situation on Iwo's eastern landing area was under control.

But conditions at the front definitely were not. As the "Duck" which was to evacuate us clambered out of the water, a hospital jeep delivered a badly wounded Marine to our group. The corpsman attending him told us to get into the "Duck" while he completed a blood transfusion which had been started in the jeep. We could see the color return to the latest casualty's chalk-like face as the precious plasma entered his veins. In a few minutes the transfusion was over, the casualty was handed on his stretcher into the "Duck" and we left that evil island — forever, I thought.

The driver of the "Duck" headed for the nearest APA transport, hoping to get our badly wounded Marine aboard ship quickly. However, the first two ships we approached waved us off. Too full, they said. This callous refusal to take one casualty aboard was unbelievable to me.

"Can't you take just one man?" I yelled to a ship's officer leaning casually over the rail above us. "He's badly hurt and needs immediate attention. The rest of us will go to another ship." It was no use. Both vessels turned us down. I was mighty upset. By this time, the color had drained from his face, and it was impossible to tell by looking at him whether he was still alive or not.

Then we spotted the hospital ship standing white and beautiful in a sea of gray transports. A hospital ship would have to be full to overflowing to turn us down, we thought. As we drew alongside it, it was obvious that the glistening ship with the majestic red cross on its hull was ready to receive casualties. No sooner did we touch sides than the big ship started to lower wire stretcher baskets.

The skill of the guys manning the "Duck" was terrific. As the first stretcher was lowered, the crew gently placed the badly wounded Marine into it, strapped him securely and sent him aloft in a hurry. Then they got the rest of us ready quietly and efficiently so that the wire baskets were air-borne in a swift, orderly pro-

cession. All the while they gave encouragement to each man, saying, "You guys are doing a great job. How are things going in there. Hope this thing is over soon," and so forth.

I was the last to go up. Despite the secure binding, I had a moment of real apprehension while being borne aloft. I was flat on my back and powerless to move a muscle from the neck down, so tight were the straps around my arms and legs. If something had gone amiss and the stretcher had fallen into the water, I'd have been a goner for sure!

But I worried needlessly. In less than a minute, the sailors topside had me safely on board, and my kindly doctor friend welcomed me to "Baltimore." I climbed out of the basket and stepped from the fiery furnace of Iwo Jima to the blessed tranquility of the *Samaritan*.

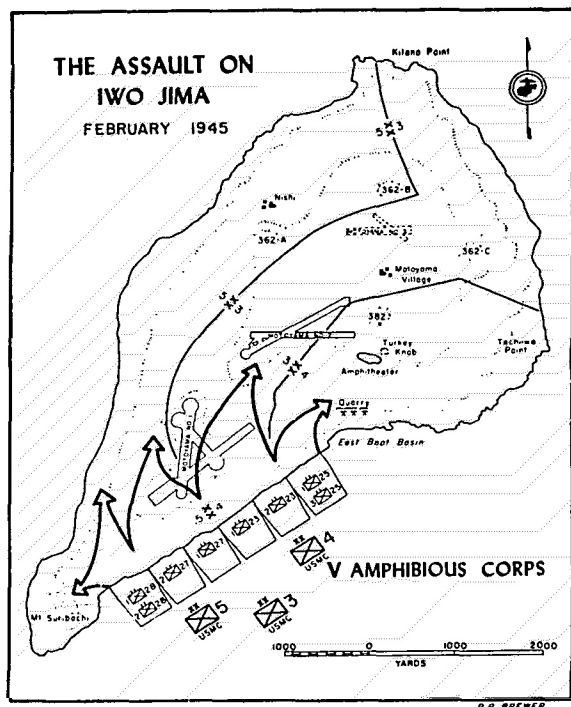
They were two different worlds. Whereas I had not stood completely upright during my entire nine and a half days on Iwo (we either sought cover or moved in crouching, hunched-over position), here it was possible to walk normally with no need to beware of snipers, artillery or mortar barrages, whining grenades or Japanese counterattacks, any one of which could snuff out your life in a second.

Dramatic evidence that things were different aboard the *Samaritan* was the presence of nurses, the first women I had seen since the Fifth Division left Hawaii in late January. One of them approached me briskly, examined my wound with a few terse comments that it didn't look serious and assigned me to a berth in a nearly empty compartment designed to hold at least a hundred casualties. Her only instructions were to keep my wound dry, which eliminated showers for a few days, at least.

My compartment didn't remain empty for long. The *Samaritan* had just returned from carrying its first load of Iwo casualties to Guam. By mid-afternoon it was filling rapidly with the mounting toll of the day's carnage ashore.

Marines were coming aboard with every conceivable type of wound, including quite a few from Company B. Two of my fellow company officers, Bob Drake and Charles Cobb, were among those brought aboard in late afternoon. As it turned out, all three of us had been hit about five minutes apart during our attack that morning.

Drake's right arm was almost shattered by multiple mortar fragments. Cobb was limping badly from grenade pieces he received when his rifle platoon overran a pillbox. Quite a few of our company's enlisted men were coming



aboard, also.

I couldn't believe the evening meal. Hot chow, Cokes and steaming coffee were topped off by ICE CREAM! Man, this was living! How different shipboard food was from the tasteless C and K rations we munched on Iwo where we didn't feel like (or have time for) eating anyhow.

Upon returning to my compartment I was yanked forcibly out of my chow-time euphoria. While I was gone, a young Marine had been placed in the bunk directly below mine. This young man had lost his left foot above the ankle, and he was taking it hard. In the almost four days we were together aboard the *Samaritan* I never heard him say a word. He just stared grimly upward at my berth.

That evening Cobb, Drake and I compared notes about our company's performance during those harrowing first ten days on Iwo. Because most of our time had been spent on or near the front lines, we had taken heavy casualties, not only from Japanese riflemen but also from heavy artillery, which came down upon us with deadly accuracy from the hills on northern Iwo Jima.

On two different occasions shells had landed directly in foxholes where Cobb's men had dug in, killing four. I had lost two of my mortarmen to artillery on 21 February, D + 2, while a third had literally given his right arm for his country. He lost it at the shoulder. At that time I didn't know whether we had been able to get him

aboard ship in time to save his life. (He came through with flying colors and is now a judge in Woburn, Mass.)

Drake, our machine gun platoon leader, had also suffered stiff casualties, and we deplored these losses. We hoped Rea Duncan, our company commander who took a rifle shot in the abdomen (also on D + 2) would be okay. We were proud of Company B's performance, which took us through the D-Day holocaust to the western beaches where we anchored the left flank of the operation attacking northward. We agreed that 22 February, when it rained hard all day and brought our company to a standstill, was our worst day of the campaign.

We knew, of course, that Mt. Suribachi, the menacing volcano on the southern tip of Iwo, had been captured by the 28th Regiment of our Division. We had been able to see Old Glory flying proudly atop the volcano since 23 February. But we had no way of knowing that the flag raising atop the mountain was the setting for the most famous picture of World War II.

Finally we "hit the sack." I had no trouble falling asleep, because I had not had more than two hours of unbroken sleep since the eve of D-Day. And on that super-charged occasion, we had been routed out of our bunks at 0430 for the Navy's famous steak-and-eggs breakfast which preceded all invasions. I slept like a log.

It was obvious at an early hour the following day, 1 March, that the *Samaritan* was not long for Iwo's waters. A steady stream of casualties soon filled every bunk. The doctors and nurses were so busy they had no time to pay the slightest attention to my half-hearted request to return to my company ashore.

After a decent night's sleep and some hot food, I felt great. I felt that I should return to Company B. But the medics gave me a brusque brushoff. They were far more concerned with the new arrivals, and I returned to my compartment. With mixed emotions, guilt at being so lightly wounded in the midst of such shocking casualties and relief at having survived the battle, I let the matter drop.

Shortly after noon we felt the *Samaritan's* powerful engines throb. In a few minutes the ship headed toward open seas. I couldn't believe my fantastic good luck. As we left Iwo Jima behind, I thanked God for my deliverance and prayed aloud for the safety of the Marines ashore. Little did I realize that in less than two weeks I would return to that hideous hell hole.

### Easy living

For a short time, the trip aboard the



Marines are pinned by withering fire.

*Samaritan* was like a Caribbean cruise. Each turn of the ship's propellor carried us away from Iwo Jima, and that was a blessing. Just as important, life aboard ship — hot food, clean sheets and the joyous luxury of being safe — was so different from the horrors of battle that I was in a state of ecstasy such as I had never experienced.

The first thing I wanted to do after the ship left Iwo was write home, telling my family that I was safe and that my wound was not serious. Censorship limited the information we could send to the date we landed and the day we were wounded (plus the type of wound) with little other information. No mention of our unit's course of action, casualties or speculation as to how long the Iwo battle would last was permitted.

So the letters were short and not so sweet. I wrote one of my brothers who had been a dive bomber pilot on the aircraft carrier *Hornet* at Midway and Santa Cruz that "you can take combat and you know what you can do with it." I'm sure he got the message.

Bob Drake's arm was so badly wounded and in such a restrictive cast that he could not manipulate a pen. So I wrote his wife as he laboriously dictated. His message was pretty personal. I felt squeamish writing such intimacies to another man's wife.

Just before evening chow we heard the Armed Forces Radio news over the ship's public address system. It had been another tough day for the Marines on Iwo with limited gains and continuing heavy casualties. Most of the communique was devoted to MGen Graves B. Erskine's Third Division which scored advances in the

center of the island. I wondered soberly how our Company B guys on the west flank were doing.

Because the *Samaritan* was a hospital ship no nighttime security was required. After the evening meal we could stand topside with lights blazing and music playing over the loudspeakers. It was a far cry from the *Deuel* (APA 160), which took us from Hawaii to Iwo, where the smoking lamp was out topside after dark and where a tiny shaft of light could endanger the entire task force.

Shortly after coming inside to hit the sack I heard an announcement over the PA: "Will the ship's chaplain report to his station."

"What do they want him for?" I asked of no one in particular.

"They're probably burying a Marine at sea," replied Cobb as he limped by. I caught on. Each time the chaplain was called, and I counted 17 such pages from the time we left Iwo until we reached Guam, the trip became less pleasant.

Friday, 2 March and Saturday, 3 March were carbon copies of the 1 March afternoon when we left Iwo Jima. Most of the time was spent writing letters, resting up and blaming the American high command for the heavy casualties the Marines were taking.

"We should never have landed so many men in such a concentrated area," said a lieutenant from another company. "The way we were jammed up on that beach every Jap shell was bound to hit somebody or something."

"Yeah," somebody else countered, "but suppose the Nips had counterattacked in strength that first night. We needed as many troops ashore as possible to keep from being thrown off that frigging island."

"Schmidt (Harry) and Howlin' Mad (Smith) should have known the Japanese weren't going to counterattack," another said. "Hell, they didn't even try to keep us from landing. They allowed us to come ashore, then they let us have it."

"And how were we meant to know they'd do that?" asked Bob Drake. "The Japanese have always counterattacked in force during the first night. There was no way to know in advance that they'd lie low and make us come to them."

"I'll tell you what we should have done," said a former paratrooper. "While the main force was landing on the beach, a couple of parachute battalions should have been dropped up north to keep the Nips from concentrating their fire on the beach." He failed to mention that the Marine Corps no longer had any parachute battalions.

"If we had done that," I said, "we couldn't

use naval gunfire or artillery on targets up north for fear of hitting our own paratroopers. You'd never have gotten out of those hills alive."

There was one thing on which we unanimously agreed. Each of us had seen few live Japanese and only a handful of dead ones. We decided that they must be pulling their casualties back under cover of nightfall so that we could not make an accurate estimate of their losses. But it was demoralizing to see all those Marine bodies and so few of the enemy.

We also felt that the planners underestimated the effect of Iwo's terrain, which gave the Japanese a tremendous advantage. We landed with Suribachi on our left and high ground to the right. Thus we were immediately caught on low ground with fire coming from both sides. In addition, they had clear visibility over our movements, while we could not see them in their entrenched positions. And, of course, no one could foresee the unbelievable volcanic ash which made for slow going and impossible maneuverability. Loaded with combat gear and bogged down in what could pass for quicksand, we were sitting ducks for Japanese gunners.

By late Saturday afternoon rumors aboard the *Samaritan* were rampant. We were less than 24 hours from Guam, according to our best estimates, and there was talk that the ship would bypass the Marianas Islands and head straight for Aiea Hospital in Hawaii.

That would have been just great with me, but events proved otherwise. At morning chow the next day (Sunday, 4 March) we were informed over the PA system that the ship would dock at Guam at 1000 hours. Ambulatory patients like myself were to disembark at Guam. Those too badly wounded to walk were to be sent to Hawaii and points east. I returned to my bunk, threw my toilet articles into the ditty bag they had given me and waited for the *Samaritan* to dock.

A runner approached. "Lieutenant Barrett?" "Yes."

"Sir, some of the guys in Company B down in the hold would like to see you before we dock. Would you like to follow me so they can say goodbye to you?"

I never felt guiltier or more ashamed in my life as I followed the runner down two ladders to the hold where the most seriously wounded Marines were being treated. Here I had been aboard the *Samaritan* almost four days and I had not taken the time to visit the men in my company, all of whom had been wounded the same day I caught my fragment. This was leadership in reverse, and I knew it.

It took every ounce of courage and will power I could muster to talk into that hold and look those men in the eye. There were six or seven from Company B, but the two I remember most vividly were Sgt Evan Jones and Pfc James Donnelly. Jones had been shot in the abdomen and was lying there swollen and bloated, clutching his prized souvenir, a Samurai sword. And Donnelly had both legs extended in plaster casts with a steel bar connecting his legs at the knees. They took my hands feebly, wished me good luck and said it had been a privilege to serve in the same company. Talk about your humbling experiences!

To make matters worse, other wounded Marines were calling out in pain and pleading for help in their agony. I said goodbye to our men with as much dignity as possible and walked out of that dreadful compartment a badly shaken officer. I vowed never to let anything like my thoughtlessness and lack of concern for members of my own company happen again. Also, the seriousness of their wounds was shocking.

In due course, the *Samaritan* docked at Guam. I joined other walking wounded leaving the ship and checked into transient officers' quarters. There I awaited orders, which I thought would send me back to the Fifth Division training camp at Hawaii. It didn't happen that way. After almost a week of hanging around admiring B-29's and trying to get as much news of the Iwo progress as possible, I was summoned on Saturday, 10 March to the adjutant's office.

"Lieutenant Barrett," the adjutant said as he handed me a piece of paper. "I have some news for you."



*Frontal attack under enemy mortar fire.*

"What's that?" I asked.

"As you can see from your orders there, you are being assigned to your unit back on Iwo Jima. You'll fly out of here Monday morning at 0800."

WOW! Back to Iwo! My face must have conveyed the shock I felt because he tried to reassure me.

"The worst of it is over now, Lieutenant. I understand the island will be declared secure in a few days."

This was scant consolation. The thought of returning to Iwo Jima sent cold chills up my spine. But in all honesty, I couldn't deny the correctness of the order. My wound was no problem. There was no danger of infection, and the fragment apparently posed no danger to my heart or lung. There was no valid reason not to return.

Another surprise awaited me. When I was wounded, I left my carbine at the aid station, so I didn't have a weapon.

"No problem, Lieutenant," the adjutant said. "I'll have a driver run you over to the armory where you can pick up another carbine."

It wasn't that easy. When I got to the armory, the gunny in charge insisted that I pay for the weapon. Can you believe that? Here I was going back into combat and being forced to pay for the damned weapon! Because I had no money, I signed an authorization permitting the Guam armory to deduct \$5.00 from each pay until the piece was paid for. It was my first lesson in installment buying.

Sunday, 11 March passed in a daze as I hurriedly performed calisthenics trying to get back into some kind of shape. I had loafed for ten days, and exercise was called for.

At 0600 on 12 March, a small group of Marines ate a nervous breakfast, then headed for the Guam airstrip where we were to pick up a MATS (Military Air Transport Service) plane. In the group were Bill Barber, a fellow lieutenant from the 26th Marines and a heavily mustachioed major from the Fourth Division.

While nervously fidgeting around in the large Quonset Hut which passed for a terminal prior to boarding our plane, my eye fell upon a miniature overseas edition of *Time* magazine. I picked it up, turned the cover and stared goggle-eyed at what I saw on page 1.

The lead story was a description of D-Day at Iwo Jima ("Hell's Acre"). Above the story was the picture which was destined to become the most famous photograph of World War II, the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi. The picture show-

ed six Marines dramatically hoisting the American flag atop the extinct volcano, and it was captioned as follows:

#### OLD GLORY ON MT. SURIBACHI

To rank with Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Tarawa

After reading every word devoted to the Iwo battle, I shook with pride and emotion as I placed the magazine on a nearby bench. Those of us on northern Iwo Jima on the date of the flag raising knew, of course, that the American flag stood atop Mt. Suribachi. We could see it waving majestically whenever we looked in that direction. But we had no idea that the capture of the menacing volcano had been recorded for posterity by such a dramatic picture. How I wish that I had put that magazine in my pack, but no such luck. I was too keyed up to think clearly, and I lost the chance for a souvenir of historical significance. I was so rattled that I didn't even show the magazine to others in our party, and I never again saw a copy of that issue.

In a few minutes we were summoned to the plane, a none-too-sturdy-looking DC-3. I climbed aboard. The pilot revved the twin engines, and we were off. Three and a half hours later the plane touched down safely on Airfield No. 1, almost in the shadow of Mt. Suribachi.

I had landed on Iwo Jima for the second time.

#### Back to Iwo

The instant my trusty boondockers touched the freshly bulldozed runway a force more powerful than any I have ever known engulfed me. It was as if Almighty God gripped my shoulders and shook me out of the lethargy in which I had spent the preceding 12 days.

"Wake up!" an inner voice said. "Be alert! Your family thinks you are safe, but you are in great peril. Don't let them down!"

I heeded that voice. As soon as I left the airplane, I automatically resumed the crouching posture all of us had taken during the early days at Iwo. But when I noticed that everybody else in the area was standing and walking erect, I stood up straight too.

Bill Barber, the only other member of the 26th Marines in our group, and I left the airfield in search of transportation to the 26th Marines' command post. We flagged down a jeep a few yards off the runway and asked for a ride.

"I'll take you to the 28th CP" the driver said. "After that you're on your own." There being no other transportation in sight, we accepted his offer.

"Where is the 28th CP?" I asked as Barber and I got into the jeep.

"It's up on Nishi Ridge." The driver assumed that we knew where Nishi Ridge was, because he offered no other explanation.

As we rode along, it was easy to see that vast changes had occurred on Iwo Jima since I left on 28 February. Seabees had bulldozed roads from rear areas to northern Iwo so that supplies could move quickly and efficiently. The same, of course, held true for the evacuation of casualties in the opposite direction. So secure were the rear areas that we watched in open-mouthed surprise as Marine service troops played softball to the strains of Jo Stafford's "Cow-Cow Boogie."

"Tough duty," Barber said whimsically. "Maybe it's like that where we're going."

"It ain't," said the driver. "There's still plenty of fighting going on up in the hills. This thing ain't over yet. A lot of Marines are going to 'buy the farm' before we can leave this place." I hoped I wasn't one of those he referred to in that "buying the farm" bit.

The farther we moved from the airfield the worse the terrain became. The ground was nothing but one rocky hill after the other. There were no trees, shrubbery or vegetation of any kind. Artillery, naval gunfire, aerial bombings and fierce in-fighting had reduced the entire portion of central Iwo Jima to a mass of scarred rubble and stone.

"Good Lord," I said to Barber, "how did our guys get through this terrain, anyhow?"

"For every yard we took, there's a dead Marine," responded our driver. Barber and I were silent, but in a few minutes, we saw what the guy meant.

Fifteen minutes after we left the airfield the jeep pulled into a rocky amphitheatre formed by what was known as Nishi Ridge. (I didn't know until years later that the ridge was named for Takeichi Nishi, a bona fide Oriental baron who commanded Japanese tanks on Iwo and who had won the equestrian gold medal for Japan in the 1932 Olympic Games at Los Angeles.)

"Here we are," said our driver as Barber and I got out. We asked where the 26th was and were told that it was based at the third airfield about a half-mile northeast of the 28th CP. There was no other way to get there, so Barber and I began to walk.

Every step produced a new horror. Marine and Japanese bodies were plentiful, with the Japanese far outnumbering our KIA's. I remembered the discussion on the *Samaritan* about seeing so few dead Japanese. Well, I was seeing them now.

At one point we passed an American 3/4-ton



*Warming coffee at a Japanese sulphur pit.*

truck. Two Marines from graves registration, if you can believe this, would reach into the rubble, grab a dead Marine by his hands and feet and fling him upwards into the truck.

"Just like the old swimming hole," remarked Barber as we recalled childhood days when we threw friends into the water with a giant swing.

"Yeah," I replied, "only this time they're really doing a 'dead man's float.'" (This sordid wisecracking was not done lightly or in jest. It was done to keep us from cracking up.)

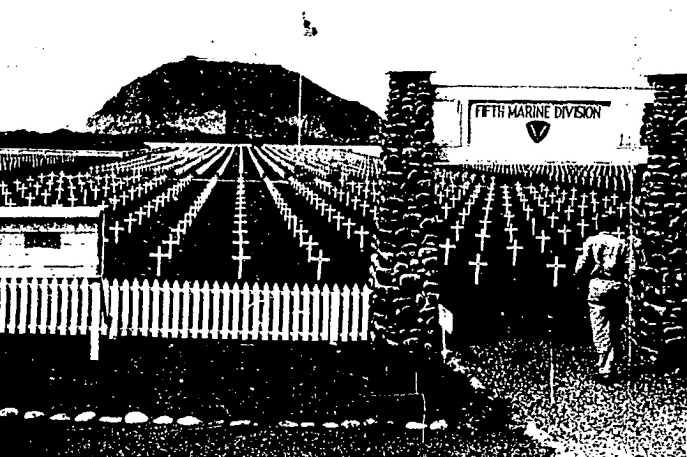
And there was something else, the nauseating stench of death. It was everywhere. You couldn't escape it. Thousands of Japanese bodies were decaying in the mid-March sun on northern Iwo. The odor was overwhelming. It was horrible.

By the time we reached the 26th Marines' CP our rifles were at the ready, and we had resumed the "Iwo crouch." Sounds of front-line activity were audible in the distance ahead. We could see columns of black smoke roiling upward, undoubtedly from a flame-throwing tank. Yes, there was plenty of fighting still going on at Iwo.

In our pre-invasion briefings we were told that the third airfield was "unfinished." It was unfinished, all right, being a succession of fox-holes and revetments. It was on the north-western rim of this area where the 1st Battalion of the 26th Marines was entrenched.

I said goodbye to Barber, who headed for the 2d Battalion to our east, and moved toward the battalion CP. En route I encountered a huge Japanese clad only in blue shorts. He was dead, but he looked freshly killed. My adrenalin pumped overtime. So did my legs.

In a few minutes I reached the 1st Battalion



"We left a lot of good men...."

CP where the first person I saw was Gene Hochfelder, a first lieutenant who commanded headquarters company.

"Allen Barrett!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here? We thought you'd be in Hawaii by now."

"So did I, Gene, but here I am. How are things going?"

"It's been brutal, but the end is in sight. I don't think we'll be going into the line again."

By this time, LtCol Daniel C. Pollock, battalion CO, and his executive officer, Maj Albert V. K. Gary, came over to welcome me back. They were so glad to see someone from the civilized world that they hung breathlessly on every word I said.

I didn't stay long at the CP. In a few minutes I left for Company B where I was given a rousing welcome by the bearded warriors who had made it to this point. They shook hands, pounded my back and offered the latest in front-line luxury, ten-in-one rations. Even phlegmatic Ed Buddy, our executive officer who took over the company when Duncan was wounded, seemed glad to see me.

Spike Donovan, my mortar platoon sergeant, filled me in on our casualties. They were heart-rending. Marines whom I had trained for a year were gone, most of them wounded, but many killed. We talked until dark. Donovan, Turner, West and others of my mortarmen told me of events which took place during my 12-day absence: how the company made gains of several hundred yards the day I was wounded, then had to pull back to tie in with the unit on our right; how a Japanese marksman killed two members of our third platoon, Sgt Tom Young and Pfc Arthur Christ, with one round; how on the night of 9 March the 60mm mortars fired for effect on a Japanese gun emplacement and set the gun on fire; how Richard Brown of our mor-

tar platoon shot and killed an enemy major the day before he himself was killed by a sniper; how Cpl Melvin Jensen, leader of my second squad, died in a mortar burst; and how the Japanese blew up a hill, taking some of our men with them.

On my part I talked of shipboard food, of seeing Jones and Donnelly and some other Company B men the day I left the *Samaritan* at Guam; of seeing movies and admiring B-29's at Guam; of causing the men to break up with laughter by showing the carbine I was "buying" through payroll deduction; and lastly, of describing the *Time* magazine I had seen that morning with the flag-raising picture atop page 1. That really turned them on.

I alternated two-hour watches with Donovan. We saw no Japanese infiltrators, although Doc Landry, our tireless corpsman, had shot one the preceding night. Also, the Navy still sent up star shells for illumination, but not as frequently as in the early days of the operation.

The night passed without incident, and in the morning there was a general feeling that Company B would not return to the line. I saw Orval Lee, Lt (now LGen) E. J. Miller's platoon sergeant, shaving. It was his first shave since D-Day.

"Lee, that beard is good camouflage. I wouldn't take it off just yet," I said.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I have a feeling that we won't need any more camouflage. Our time on the line is over."

It began to look that way. Tuesday the 13th and Wednesday the 14th were spent in our fox-holes. The men were confident we'd be back aboard ship soon. I almost started to believe them.

Two upsetting events occurred on the 14th. First, Ed Buddy suffered a cut hand and had to be evacuated. This left me as the only original officer in Company B. Second, and this was horrendous, a Fourth Division Marine who had gone unscathed came over to our area to say goodbye to one of his friends. The Fourth Division had already secured its zone of operation and was to leave Iwo either that day or the next. The visitor was sitting upright on the edge of our man's foxhole. I went over to him.

"Either get in the hole or lie down," I told him. "You make too good a target sitting up like that." He stretched out in the prone position, leaning on his elbows.

I turned away and started back to my fox-hole. In one of those dreadful vagaries of war, a shell from nowhere landed nearby. A fragment went chugging audibly through the air and hit



the Fourth Division Marine in the chest. It went in his left side and out his right. He was in extreme pain, naturally. We eased his pain with morphine and got him back to the rear for evacuation as quickly as possible.

I was sick, I mean almost physically ill. If I hadn't told that Marine to lie flat, maybe the fragment would have missed him. Where had that shell come from? Was it one of our's or one of their's? I never knew whether the man lived or died. The memory of that awful moment haunts me to this day even though I did the right thing in ordering him to lie down.

Ed Buddy's departure left two (out of 21) rifle company officers who had landed on D-Day in the 1st Battalion: Lt R. C. Miller, of Company A and me. We were reinforced with several replacement platoon leaders who did a fantastic job, but we were the only "old hands" at Col Pollock's disposal.

After morning chow on Thursday the 15th, the Colonel summoned Miller and me to the CP. We were joined by Lt Bert Kessel, a headquarters company officer, who had taken over what was left of Company C. I feared the worst, and my forebodings were confirmed when we saw Maj Gary and Capt Aram Rejebian, battalion operations officer, waiting for us with Pollock.

"Prepare your men to move out at 1400," the Colonel told us. We were going into the extreme northwestern portion of the island. This area contained the worst terrain on Iwo Jima. We studied maps which pinpointed the ground we were to attack. It was Col Pollock's objective to drive north from our present location to Kitano Point, the northwestern tip of the island.

"Bob," the Colonel said to Miller, "we're going to combine Companies A and B into one unit. That way you'll have a little more than 100 men to work with. You'll be the company commander and Allen will be your exec. You've got some top-notch NCO's you can count on, and the troops are well rested. I think we can secure our area in a couple of days.

The Colonel was absolutely right about the NCO's. They were terrific. PltSgt Isaac Hutchins was the only one I knew from Company A, but we still had some in Company B: 1stSgt John Farris, Orval Lee, Spike Donovan and Cpl Jim Blackman, who gave us a solid nucleus of proud fighters. I even felt optimistic as we returned to "spread the word" about moving out.

The men were already rolling their packs when Miller, Kessel and I returned. Somehow

they knew we'd be heading back into the line. We briefed the replacement officers and our NCO's. At 1400, the newly formed Company A/B moved northwestward from Airfield No. 3 into a jungle of rock and stone.

It was our mission to relieve elements of the 3d Battalion, bone weary and battered as ourselves. It was a costly relief. From my position in the company CP a few yards behind the lines, I heard shooting. I moved forward to check our progress and came upon Blackman, who said that his platoon was in position. We lay flat on sharp rocks that typified the ground on northern Iwo.

"I heard shooting," I said. "Did you lose any men?"

Blackman squinted at me. "Two."

"That's not too bad," I said. (Can you believe that? Two members of Company B had just been killed, and I told him it wasn't too bad!)

The remainder of that afternoon and all of Friday the 16th were a nightmare of cries for corpsmen, requests for stretchers whining grenades and Japanese bullets that found their mark all too often. It was the same old story. They could see us, and we couldn't see them.

At noon on the 16th, came a sad report up and down the line: "Sergeant Lee got it." That was a cruel blow to all of us. Our guys hunkered down and vowed to avenge him.

On Saturday the 17th, we made an unbelievable breakthrough. The day started, as did the preceding one, with a bulldozer carving a path out of the incredible rubble. Our men followed a flame-throwing tank using the bulldozed path. Somehow there was no resistance. We moved briskly and confidently several hundred yards to the top of a hill overlooking Kitano Point. We moved our CP to that hill, chewed a couple of C ration biscuits for evening chow and bedded down for the night.

Our hill had a steep incline dropping away from our position, and we did not post a lookout in that direction. Or maybe we were careless as a result of the day's successful advance. Whatever, in the darkness, I heard a click from behind, was aware that an object landed on Farris's chest and felt it roll across my chest, coming to rest a few inches from my right side. It started to hiss.

"Grenade!" I yelled, and vacated as quickly as possible. The hissing subsided, then stopped. When the next star shell gave us some light, we saw a Japanese grenade lying there harmlessly. It had been a dud! I didn't sleep that night.

The next morning I was manning the phone

when I heard Col Pollock speaking to Col Chester Graham, regimental CO: "My men can get through that pocket, Colonel. We broke through to Kitano Point, and we can get through that pocket."

My heart sunk. In a few minutes orders came to move back over the ground we had captured the previous day and head into Death Valley, where the Japanese were making their last stand.

Death Valley, also called Bloody Gorge, was a jumbled ravine of rocks and stone running several hundred yards from northwestern Iwo to the ocean. Here the remaining Japanese were holed up. Col Pollock felt that the enemy commanding officer, LGen Tadamichi Kuribayashi, was with them. Pollock wanted to capture that general.

So back we went for the final push. En route to the head of the gorge, Miller, Kessel and I were summoned to a hill overlooking the objective. Col Graham was there. He told us there would be no supporting fire from ships, planes or artillery, because the target was too confined to permit such activity. Even the use of flame-throwing tanks was questionable. It was to be our riflemen against theirs.

I only half heard Col Graham. I was too busy looking at the ships anchored off the western beaches waiting to take us back to Hawaii. I yearned for those ships.

On our way back to the company, we had a totally unexpected surprise. A regimental cook stood by our route to the gorge with a can of apricots, swimming in sweet syrup. We each got two apricots, and I have cherished canned apricots ever since.

Getting into the line late Sunday afternoon was another harrowing and deathly experience. I wanted the company to set up for the night on a slight ridge perhaps 25-30 yards up ahead, and said to Hutchins, "Take your men down there, Hutch, and dig in for the night."

"Jesus Christ, Lieutenant, why is it always my platoon?"

"You and Blackman are all we have left, and he's over there on the right. I just want you to tie in on his left."

"Okay, but..."

W-R-A-C-K! A rifle shot came from our left. Hutch fell dead, shot squarely between the eyes. His great black boots protruded ominously from beneath the poncho we threw over him. Hutch stood only about four feet from me when he was hit.

The next morning came an even closer call.

Farris and I were huddled in our foxhole determining the number of men left to us when the lethal sniper fired again. Farris fell forward with a bullet through his chest. The same round clipped a Marine behind Farris. Once again a Japanese marksman nailed two of our men with one shot.

We carried the wounded back to the aid station and started through Death Valley. We didn't get far. Even Col Pollock was hit in the shoulder and evacuated. Maj Gary took over as battalion commander.

One after another our valiant men fell. West, a skilled mortarman now, used as a rifleman, died in the thick of that ghastly gorge. But the worst, the absolute worst, came when Bob Abbott of E. J. Miller's second platoon, was killed a few minutes before we left the line for the last time on 21 March, the first day of spring.

Company B departed Iwo Jima on Sunday, 25 March. Of the original 246 men who landed on 19 February, 32 climbed up the landing nets to safety 35 days later. Most of those had been wounded and returned to duty.

Tuesday morning, 27 March, we heard aboard ship that there had been a Japanese *banzai* attack which did considerable damage in the Fifth Division sector the previous night. For a short time there was a possibility that we might be returned to the island. Happily, that did not come to pass.

Shortly after chow that evening our ship sailed away from Iwo Jima. So great had been our losses that the entire 26th Regiment rattled around the ship which would have been crowded carrying one regulation-sized battalion. We were enjoying the evening breeze and rejoicing in the knowledge that our ordeal was finally and truly over.

As the ship rounded Mt. Suribachi and headed east, a shrill whistle blew over the PA system. It was followed by the words: "Now let us observe one minute of silence for those who are not returning with us."

A thousand thoughts went through my mind: of West and Abbott, Hutchins and Lee and so many, many others who had "bought the farm," as our jeep driver had predicted. There was also a haunting thought: "Why was I spared?"

When the minute was over, tears were running down my face. Spike Donovan, at my side, said, "We left a lot of good men on that lousy island. I sure hope it was worth all those lives."

Amen, Spike. Six thousand, eight hundred and twenty-one times, Amen.

USMC