

STING OF BATTLE

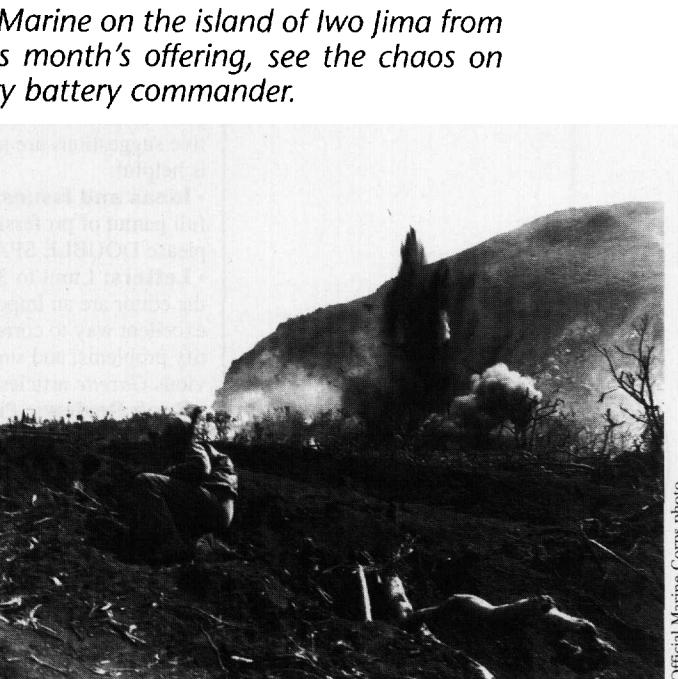
Iwo Jima on D+1

by Col George K. Dike, USMCR(Ret)

The 'Sting of Battle' touched every Marine on the island of Iwo Jima from 19 February–14 March 1945. In this month's offering, see the chaos on D+1 from the eyes of a young artillery battery commander.

On the morning of D+1, the 105mm howitzers of our battalion (3d Battalion, 13th Marines) were well dug in and sandbagged on a terrace parallel to Green Beach, and firing missions toward the base of Mount Suribachi. A Japanese machinegun, firing from near Suribachi, sprayed our position area with a burst of fire. Several men who were moving between gunpits were hit, including me. My injury was slight, but the shot changed my attitude abruptly. I knew that I could be hit.

Later that same day our battalion executive officer (XO) sent a message for me to come from our battery position to the battalion fire direction center (FDC). It was about 150 yards inland in an area that had been cleared by the 27th Marines going north and the 28th Marines going south. Our planes were putting bombs and napalm on Suribachi, and our naval gunfire was very noisy in both directions. I was running along a telephone line toward the FDC when I heard the telltale chatter of a Nambu machinegun. Over my shoulder I could see spurts of sand gaining on me. Fortunately, several hummocks of sand gave me brief protection before arriving, shaken, at the FDC, located in a burned-out structure showing a few feet above ground and perhaps 15 feet down into the ground like an inverted farm silo. I looked down and was told



Official Marine Corps photo.

that all available space was filled with men and equipment. The XO and I began talking to each other when I heard some heavy mortar "coughs" followed by loud bursts. There were shouts of "take cover." I had no cover from mortars.

About 200 yards away, two of our tanks were struggling inland. I could see that a Japanese gunner was going after the tanks with 120mm mortar "searching fire," that is, two clicks up, two clicks left, two clicks up, etc. I was horrified to see that the tanks and the mortar fire were converging on me. I felt a surge of panic. But suddenly the tanks stopped and so did the mortars. I recovered my senses and hurried back to our howitzer position area—encouraged by the Nambu and the sand spurts.

I survived a number of other close calls but none remembered as clearly as this. I knew it was possible to get protection from flat trajectory fire, but I hated those mortars. Even after 57 years the mortar-like coughs of some Fourth of July fireworks make me think of Iwo Jima.



>Then-Capt Dike was CO, Btry I, 3d Bn, 13th Mar during the battle on Iwo Jima.



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