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The Shame of IWO JIMA

At last, the shocking facts behind the bloodiest battle in Marine Corps history, the one single engagement that produced 28,640 casualties—or almost one third of all Marine dead in World War II! Yet the truth is told here for the first time—that it resulted from the war's costliest blunder!



By Ladislav Farago

On the night before February 19, 1945, Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, a salty, tough, two-fisted Marine Corps officer whose men long before had christened "Old Howlin' Mad," stared at a small piece of paper in his cabin on board the *USS Eldorado*, and slowly bowed his head.

"Lord," he read, repeating the prayer of a bygone British general, "I shall be verie busy this day. I may forget Thee, but do not Thou forget me."

The Marine officer showed rare foresight. He was more than "verie busy" the next day. He was up to his ears in one of the grimmest and costliest battles, in the number of its casualties, of World War II.

He and his men on that day began the battle for Iwo Jima.

Thirty-six days later, on March 26, the Stars and Stripes were raised as planned on Iwo, and the bloody campaign was ended.

It took weeks to bury the Iwo dead and months to organize the cemeteries. On October 2, 1945, a memorial flagstaff was erected on Mt. Suribachi, but by then no live Marine was left on the island to witness the ceremony on battered, old Hotrocks.

It fell to an Army officer, Brig. Gen. Frederick M. Hopkins, Jr., to dedicate the flagstaff and pronounce

history's verdict. "There are no words," Gen. Hopkins now said, actually choking up, "that can adequately describe the suffering on Iwo."

"War is cruel," General William Tecumseh Sherman told the citizens of ravaged Atlanta, "and it cannot be refined." The Battle for Iwo Jima showed, however, that it could be made more cruel.


"It was the most savage and costly battle in the history of the Marine Corps," said General Smith later. "Indeed, it has few parallels in military annals."

Actually it has none. For all its glory, the Battle for Iwo was a freak and a unique folly of man.

For thirty-six days, more than 90,000 troops—American and Japanese—fought on less than eight square miles of island—some 12,500 men per square mile. Every yard of terrain was the front line. It was troglodyte war on a primitive level. It burned men into ashes, blasted through concrete masses, split the earth with seismic violence. It entombed thousands alive.

Only the casualties of Iwo Jima can give a true measure of this battle. When the smoke lifted, *Iwo was a smoldering morgue of 26,797 dead!* Of the 21,060 Japanese defending it, only one thousand survived!

(Continued on next page)



Pinned down in unexpected volcanic ash from Mt. Suribachi, withered by a monstrous hail of deadly Jap gunfire supposedly "silenced" by the Navy, the first Marine Corps wave to hit Iwo Jima never had a chance. Before the island was secured, more than 6,000 died, and many thousands more were maimed for life.

IWO JIMA continued

It was—far and away—the worst disaster in Marine Corps history.

When the Iwo operation was planned on paper, even the worst pessimist failed to anticipate more than 15,000 casualties to result from the capture of Iwo, and this was a staggering estimate to begin with. Many thought it was far too high. Nobody thought it was too low.

Afterwards, it took years to add up all the dead and the wounded, and the combat fatigue cases, of Iwo Jima. Even in 1955, ten years after the operation, 44 officers and men still were carried in a vague category, listed as "missing."

Our casualty figures that were bandied about were notoriously inexact. Frequently they were so computed as to mask the true magnitude of the losses and a juggling of Iwo's toll persists to this day.

But here is the final score, the incredible figure under the last line—the grand total of the price Americans paid for Iwo Jima:

The final figure of all casualties—Marines, Navy and Army—came to 28,640. Our dead totaled 6,821.

The total casualties of the Marine Corps in all of the Second World War amounted to 91,718. Their 25,811 dead and wounded on Iwo alone represented well over a quarter of all their casualties in World II. Iwo's contribution to the grand total of their dead was still worse. Of the 19,733 battle deaths of the Marine Corps in World War II, Iwo was responsible for almost 6,000.

In plain English, *Iwo produced more than one-fourth of all Marine casualties, and about one-third of all Marine dead in World War II.*

What happened to cause such unprecedented casualties?

While Pearl Harbor was subjected to a spectacular scrutiny after the war, nobody in Congress or in the Pentagon ever has bothered to seek an explanation for Iwo Jima. The overwhelming fact of victory in history's toughest battle was shrewdly balanced against the price we had to pay for it. No effort ever was made to raise the issue of responsibilities, or to establish the true causes of the heavy casualties.

However, a frightful casualty list like this cannot be justified with rhetorics, or explained away with

rationalizations. It poses moot questions that clamor for conclusive answers.

- Is it possible to review the Battle for Iwo from this angle?

- Is it possible to pinpoint the man or men whose commission or omission was primarily responsible for the Marines' cruel losses?

I believe it is possible.

Something did go very wrong on Iwo, as the first men to hit the beaches properly surmised. They could not know it, of course, but the whole operation was badly jeopardized even before it started.

In actual fact, there were *two* battles for Iwo Jima, not just the one you remember, mostly from Joe Rosenthal's pretty picture of raising the Stars and Stripes on Mt. Suribachi.

In the little-known *Second Battle for Iwo Jima*, our admirals and generals did the fighting. They fought over plans and schedules; over the size of the expeditionary force; over the equipment and fire support the Marines needed; over the meaning of intelligence reports and the interpretation of Washington directives.

"We had to haggle like horse traders," old Howlin' Mad told me, "balancing irreplaceable lives against replaceable ammunition. I was never so depressed in my life."

This was to be the Marines' big show, but stiff-necked and tradition-bound, and claiming their statutory birthright, the admirals of the Navy insisted on running it. To them—gallant men of doubtless integrity—the Marines' war was what they could see from the bridges of their ships, at the far end of their binoculars.

But to the generals of the Marine Corps, war was the close-up of bloody lagoons and beaches. They were haunted by the ghosts of Marines killed by Jap defenses that should have been taken out by naval gunfire but were not. Now they dreaded the price they expected to pay for Iwo because of what General Smith



bitterly called "the mental arteriosclerosis of the Navy."

They begged and bargained! They shouted obscenities and pounded the conference tables! They pulled rank and strings!

But it was of no avail. Iwo was the pay-off and the acid test. As usual, the Marines triumphed in the field, against simply incredible odds. But those odds had to be so much greater because, as usual, they lost at the conference table—or rather on the playing fields of Annapolis.

Here, now, is the never-before-told, the detailed story of that strange and disturbing *Second Battle for Iwo Jima*, that raged from the moment the island first became a gleam in our eyes to the split second of the first Marine's landing on its volcanic ash.

When a Japanese staff officer, Major Y. Horie, visited Iwo some time in 1944, he made an entry in his diary: "Only an island of sulphur spring," he wrote, "no water, no sparrow, no swallow."

It was indeed a desolate speck in a watery waste, extending westward less than five miles from Mt. Suribachi, an extinct volcano at its narrow southern tip. The island is a mute memorial to Suribachi's bygone violence. It is covered with a deep layer of coarse, volcanic ash. Cross-ventilated by the brisk Pacific winds, the air on Iwo is usually filled with particles of grit.

Even during the greediest years of colonial scramble, no nation was foolish enough to stake out a claim to Iwo. All it had was that sulphur spring and nothing else. There was hardly a drop of drinking water indigenous to the island. (Continued on page 66)



The author of this shocking story, a high-ranking Naval Intelligence officer of World War II, names names and pulls no punches in fixing the blame for the debacle of Iwo

Shame of Iwo

Continued from page 17

Beasts and birds judiciously avoided it. Men cursed their bad fortune when they had to stop over, even for a night. It fell to Japan purely by default, because nobody else came to collect it.

Iwo Jima first popped into Washington considerations only in September 1943, when the war was almost two years old. The Joint War Planning Commission stumbled upon this godforsaken spot and marked it down for future reference, as a *potentially* useful objective on our way to Tokyo. Even then, so little information was on tap about Iwo that the Washington planners spoke of it as part of the Bonins, although it actually belonged to a group known as the Volcano Islands.

As the tide of the war turned, the Japanese had also recognized the strategic significance of the island, and had begun to build it up into a mighty defensive bastion. By 1944, they had two airfields operational on Iwo, used by their Navy planes to harass our Fortresses. A powerful radar station spotted the bombers on their way to Japan, and then warned Tokyo of their approach.

It was getting too much! B-29 crews began cracking up under the strain. Air Force morale was sagging badly on Saipan and Tinian.

The Air Force now literally begged the Joint Chiefs to give them Iwo. But they encountered stiff opposition from the Chiefs, who, from their Washington vantage point, had different plans. They hoped to solve the problem with the more spectacular conquest of Formosa.

Fortunately for the Air Force, the top brass in the Pacific had a very low opinion of Formosa. The idea of taking Iwo instead was gaining the upper hand when Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of all Pacific operations, joined its advocates.

Admiral Nimitz's interest in Iwo was kindled by a top secret study prepared by Captain Forrest Sherman, head of his Fleet War Plans Division. Captain Sherman agreed with the commanding generals of the Army and Air Force in the Pacific who saw "no advantage whatsoever in the capture of Formosa." They asked for Iwo or another foothold in the Bonin-Volcano groups. Moreover, Sherman pointed out that the forces in the Pacific were insufficient for an objective as big as Formosa.

That clinched the argument as far as Nimitz was concerned.

Target date was set for January 20, 1945.

Up to this point, the Marines were blissfully unaware of what was being cooked up for them. For the Marines, life in the Pacific had boiled down to training for combat, combat, more training followed by more combat. Used to doing what they were told to

do, and excluded from the strategic planning of even those campaigns which they had to execute, they stolidly waited for their next assignment—Formosa or Iwo. It made little difference to them.

They had three divisions available for either operation. In August, the 3rd Marine Division had completed the liberation of Guam. Before that, in June and July, the 4th Marine Division had participated in the conquest of Saipan and Tinian. The 5th Marine Division was not yet battle-tested, but it had many seasoned veterans of prior operations.

It wasn't until October 9, 1944, that General Smith, commanding general of the Fleet Marine Force in the Pacific, was first told by Admiral Nimitz that Iwo would be his next job. He received his orders "to seize Iwo," together with an already completed study of the operation made within the week by Admiral Nimitz's staff; and with a directive naming the command echelon of the operation.

Contrary to popular belief, the Marine Corps was never in actual charge of these amphibious epics, certainly not up to the water's edge. The Marine brass entered the picture relatively low in the staggered command structure, and had a rather subordinate position in the chain of command. Furthermore, General Smith was a fairly low man on the totem pole. Admiral Spruance was designated Operation Commander responsible to Admiral Nimitz. He was followed by a galaxy of other admirals: Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, to command the Joint Expeditionary Force; Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill, to be his Second-in-Command; Rear Admiral William H. P. Blandy, in command of the Amphibious Support Force; and other admirals and captains, to command the Gunfire Covering Force, the Support Carrier Group, the Mine Group, the Underwater Demolition Group and so on down to the Air Support Control Unit.

Designated in fourth place in the directive, after Nimitz, Spruance and Turner, General Smith's job was supposed to begin where the Navy's job ended—at the water's edge. But Smith thought his *responsibilities* began long before that—with the boarding of the first invasion-bound Marine on a Navy ship.

On his part, Smith designated Major General Harry Schmidt, commanding general of the V Amphibious Corps, to command the Landing Force on Iwo; and instructed him to draw up a tentative blueprint of the operation, with a shopping list of his needs.

Schmidt had to do his planning in the straitjacket of two serious limitations. One was the mass of intelligence data that was pouring in but, on closer scrutiny, proved to be alarmingly deficient in hard facts of truly up-to-date vintage. The other was the strictly rationed support he was told to expect from the Navy.

Throughout the Pacific war, intel-

ligence was uncommonly facilitated by a startling laxity in Japanese security, even in the most forward combat zones. Indoctrinated with a spirit of invincibility, Japan's combat troops could not very well be told to burn their papers when facing certain defeat. As a result, every command post we captured in the Pacific was literally bulging with invaluable intelligence data in files the enemy had carelessly left behind.

However, there was a grave deficiency in this lavish intelligence support—it was excellent as far as it went, but it did not go far enough. This was an operation planned for the early winter of 1945, but the intelligence data pre-dated July 1944.

There was an intelligence gap of at least eight fateful months that was serious enough by itself. It was made near fatal by a fantastic development on Iwo of which the planners in Pearl Harbor remained largely unaware.

Just when American intelligence was more or less closing the book on Iwo, the Japanese decided to open it up and completely rewrite this chapter of the Pacific war. It was done with such skill and in such secrecy that it completely fooled American intelligence and seriously undermined the quality of our plans.

While Iwo was rather late in the war to attract American attention, it began to figure prominently in Japanese plans long before it became a real bone of contention. Already in 1943, they began the construction of a network of three airfields, and in 1944, they had two of them operational. They started pouring troops into the tiny island, until by May-June, 1944, they had 7,000 men on the rock.

The growing density of Iwo's population even appalled the Japanese commander, and thereby made him the wrong man in the right place, in the eyes of his superiors in Tokyo. They replaced him with a man who came determined to immortalize himself with a bitter-end defense of Iwo. He was Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi, a ruthless martinet and a metallic fighting machine, a cavalry officer of the old Samurai school, and one totally dedicated to the Bushido spirit.

In a period of only eight months, and largely unbeknown by our intelligence, Gen. Kuribayashi turned the perfunctorily-fortified island into an almost impregnable bastion, bristling with guns, covered with pillboxes and blockhouses, and garrisoned by a force that was out of all proportion to the size and apparent importance of Iwo.

Even more important than the surface fortifications of the island, which Kuribayashi inherited and expanded, was a subterranean network which enabled him to fight the war on two levels—both on and under the ground. This was his answer to the major preparatory measure of the United States, bombardment from the air. His active defense against our air raids was only moderately successful, deceiving us into an exaggeration of the effectiveness of those raids. How-

ever, Kuribayashi's passive defense preparations were so formidable and successful that they enabled him to conserve his strength virtually intact.

In the end, eight months of intermittent bombardment, 72 days of daily land-based air raids, and three days of stepped-up shelling did little even to scratch these fortifications.

Kuribayashi's system of static defense was based on an ingenious exploitation of Iwo's many caves. They were improved and made habitable; their entrances were camouflaged and so planned as to make them virtually impregnable even to direct hits. The network ranged from small caves that could accommodate only a few men to several so big as to house up to 2,000 men.

Kuribayashi then set out, in the short time available to him, to build a system of tunnels to connect the caves and the various defense sections. His plans called for some 40,000 yards of such underground passageways. About 5,000 yards of them had been completed when we landed. One of these passages, near an airfield, was capable of accommodating 2,000 troops. Another, 500-foot-long tunnel, about 75 feet underground, led to Kuribayashi's main communications center. It was a large blockhouse of reinforced concrete whose roof was ten feet thick.

The fantastic revamping of the barren rock into an impregnable fortress went on at breakneck speed, but little of it was evident to our intelligence. Men and material kept pouring into Iwo, from as far away as Tokyo. Kuribayashi's building program needed enormous quantities of cement and reinforcing rods, and other vital construction material. He was getting almost everything he needed. His new gun positions clamored for more guns and he was getting them, too. The new fortified positions needed men and more men, and they were arriving on schedule. Some of this build-up could not escape the attention of American observers now flying daily sorties over Iwo. Yet most of it did. Or if it did not escape them, their observations certainly failed to alert American intelligence to the magnitude of Gen. Kuribayashi's program.

Our ignorance of Kuribayashi's move under ground, and his complete revamping of Iwo's surface fortifications with an intricate system of new pillboxes and blockhouses, was but one of the several gaps in the American intelligence effort.

Our failure to recognize the magnitude of the build-up of his garrison was another.

Our intelligence properly assumed that Kuribayashi was getting in reinforcements. But it badly underestimated the flow. The documents captured on Saipan showed that even in May-June 1944, Kuribayashi had about 7,000 officers and men in his command. By October-November, intelligence figured he had a garrison approaching 10,000. The last estimate of the Japanese order of battle was prepared on January 6, 1945, at a

time when all arrangements for the invasion had been completed.

The final head-count of American intelligence gave the grand total of Japanese strength on Iwo as a maximum of 13,900 officers and men, of whom only 10,800 were thought to be combat troops.

By then, however, Kuribayashi actually had 21,060 men on Iwo, all of them trained and equipped for combat. His actual combat strength was thus double our intelligence's final estimate!

Our intelligence was similarly far off the mark in its estimate of the Japanese heavy weapons on Iwo, the very guns which were to raise such havoc with the Marines, and kill and maim so many of them. And no wonder! Even between December 3, 1944 and February 10, 1945, Japanese gun positions increased by as much as 700 per cent, while the percentage of the increase was in the thousands over the status reflected in those captured Japanese documents, getting more antiquated by the hour.

To top it all, our intelligence did not even know that Kuribayashi was on Iwo, much less what revolutionary and costly changes he was making there. Intelligence reports named Major General Koto Osuka as the senior officer in over-all command on Iwo, although he had been replaced by General Senda in December 1944; and although both Osuka and Senda only commanded the Army's mixed brigade.

*A man in the right, with
God on his side, is in the
majority though he be alone
—H. W. Beecher.*

Kuribayashi was known to be somewhere in the area. But our intelligence located him on Chichi Jima, where he was supposed to be watching, more or less idly, the developing doom of Iwo.

The haphazard nature of this intelligence effort, for a major operation against an island shrouded in mystery, can best be illustrated by two examples.

Early in December 1944, the submarine *Spearfish* sneaked up to the coast of Iwo, and its enterprising skipper upped periscope, hoping to be able to observe the island and watch the activities of the Japanese troops. His observations proved invaluable, but his was virtually the only eyewitness report we had. This independent surveillance by the commanding officer of a random sub, made upon his own initiative, remained the sole effort to obtain first-hand information.

Not until the Navy's underwater demolition teams, and a handful of Marines accompanying them, brought back soil samples a couple of days before the landings did we have an accurate knowledge of the forbidding nature of the beaches, and of the

volcanic ash that covered them. By then it was far too late to adapt our vehicles to the terrain or to issue field shoes that would have prevented the men from sinking ankle deep into the soft ash.

While deficiencies were rampant in every respect (and even the trusted charts supplied by the U.S. Hydrographic Office proved out-dated or inaccurate), some of our intelligence officers permitted themselves to be carried away by their imagination, and to indulge in a bit of war-time melodrama. Photo interpretation revealed the existence of many partially-buried gasoline drums on the beaches. Someone in intelligence, who recalled the alleged British stratagem to pour oil on the English Channel and thus build a wall of fire to prevent the Nazis from invading England, now warned that these gasoline drums might be there to serve a similar purpose—to check our landing forces with a curtain of fire. However, no panic was created by this figment of the imagination, and no special arrangements were made to counter it. This one suspected Japanese defense gimmick failed to materialize.

It should be evident even from this random listing that Iwo was one of the major intelligence blunders of the war. In retrospect, our entire intelligence effort for Iwo appears to have been totally inadequate, even smug and arrogant. It failed altogether to present a comprehensive and accurate picture of the island. It misled the planners in drafting their blueprints. And, worst of all, it sent the Marines into an island about which we knew terribly little, and what little we knew proved dangerously, expensively inaccurate.

In actual fact, the whole venture was gravely endangered by these shortcomings of our intelligence, and only last minute luck saved us from a major disaster that could have thwarted the landings. The Japanese had built ingeniously located positions for heavy guns to cover the beaches on which they expected us to land. These positions represented a potentially fatal threat to the invasion, but our intelligence failed to have even the slightest inkling of them.

Fortunately for us, on February 17—the second day of our pre-invasion bombardment—the Japs were misled into opening a murderous fire from these very batteries whose location was entirely unknown until then. This fatal blunder of the enemy enabled us to pinpoint their most dangerous gun positions, those which flanked our landing beaches. According to General Schmidt, only their last-minute destruction enabled the Marines even to land on D-Day.

The whole Japanese defense plan was based on a network of major defensive installations—systems of pillboxes, blockhouses and caves—and these became primarily responsible for the heavy casualties. Our intelligence tried to locate these defensive

installations, but managed to pinpoint only those that could be seen on the aerial photographs. In their final report, they told the Marines about 450 of such installations, all they could find plus an upward estimate. In actual fact, the Marines bumped into 750 of them and found even those whose existence was known fully or virtually intact. Inadequate as the naval gunfire was, it proved even more ineffective because our intelligence had failed to ascertain and advise about the true strength of the installations!

Who was responsible for this near-fatal intelligence blunder, which had such unprecedented casualties as a result?

The Marines had two major intelligence organizations working on Iwo—the G-2 of General Smith's "Task Force 56," headed by Col. Edmond J. Buckley; and the G-2 of General Schmidt's V Amphibious Corps headed by Col. Thomas R. Yancey, an Army officer loaned for the operation. But the limited intelligence organization of the Marines was not equipped to procure the kind of sweeping and detailed information needed in advance by the planners of the campaign. Buckley's, and especially Yancey's, sections were assigned chiefly to combat intelligence, expected to supply tactical information during the campaign, to interrogate prisoners, and to exploit captured documents.

How little the Marines themselves had of their own was highlighted by the fact that the G-2 section of the Expeditionary Troops was thrown together from intelligence officers of the Fleet Marine Force; but even this improvised organization began to function only in December, when the planning stage of the campaign had been concluded and the vast bulk of intelligence data was frozen "as was" as of that date, some two months prior to the actual invasion.

By contrast, Japanese intelligence turned out to be uncannily excellent. Gen. Kuribayashi put his intelligence units into high gear in the immediate wake of Saipan's fall, in July 1944, and kept it there to the bitter end. In addition, he was supplied with the highest quality intelligence from Tokyo.

Even while our ships were assembling, Japanese submarines kept them under constant surveillance and reported every move to Tokyo. Due to these snooping subs, and to their communications intelligence, the element of surprise at Iwo was completely cancelled out, although it figured most prominently in our own calculations, and was instrumental in the Navy's eventual decision to curtail the softening-up of Iwo. Some ten to fourteen days prior to the assault, and *about a week before the first American ship appeared off Iwo*, Tokyo warned Kuribayashi that the attack was imminent! How accurate and detailed this information was became abundantly evident from the documents we captured on Iwo. A

notebook found on a dead Japanese contained this intelligence:

"The task force will take four days to arrive at Iwo Jima from Saipan. One battleship, 18 cruisers and destroyers, 40 transports left Hawaii. (? and 5th Marine Division) 3rd and 4th Marine Divisions, one brigade." The question mark could be left at that. In actual fact, only the three divisions listed participated in the operation.

Thanks to their intelligence, Kuribayashi had ample time to alert and deploy his forces. He put them in Condition Red on February 14; and by next day, or four days before our landings, all Japanese units had left their bivouacs and took up their battle assignments.

It is obvious that foolproof intelligence is essential for foolproof planning. As it is, not even the greatest tactical genius in the world can plan safely and well with blatantly, grossly-faulty intelligence data. Yet the planning of Gen. Schmidt suffered from other, equally detrimental arrangements, similarly un conducive to saving Marine lives.

Most discouraging even at this stage was the strict rationing of naval support the Marines could expect for the operation.

In the beginning, Smith and Schmidt were told that the Navy would give them a cruiser division to begin the shelling of Iwo on D-minus 8, and seven old battleships, with six additional cruisers, to step up the shelling on D-minus 3. The two Marine generals recoiled. Even in the face of the inadequate intelligence data about Iwo's defenses, the Marines' naval gunfire specialists warned them in no uncertain terms that the island needed an awful lot of hot lead to soften it up.

It became evident to Smith and Schmidt that much more was needed than what the Navy was willing to supply. Already on October 24, General Schmidt asked for 10 days of shelling by the cruiser division, and at least 3 days by the old BBs and the additional cruisers. He was profoundly shaken by the answer he received.

Admiral Turner informed him that his request could not be met. Worse still, Turner now advised him that a general shift in schedules and the needs of General MacArthur (who was then mounting his dramatic return to the Philippines) had necessitated a downward revision of naval preliminary fire. The cruiser division was out. Total naval preliminary fire was cut to three days of battleship bombardment!

By then, General Smith had even broader qualms. In the innermost recesses of his mind, he was not quite sure that this whole trip to Iwo was necessary at all.

"When Admiral Nimitz advised me that Iwo Jima was to be our next objective," General Smith told me, "we had already captured Saipan, Tinian and Guam. We had then just

finished the mopping up on Palau. I felt that the Marines' war had come to an end with the capture of Palau.

"My feelings were based on certain conversations I had a few months before with a bright Jap on Saipan. He was a certain Yoshida, a mere major, but actually far more important than his rank indicated. He was the liaison officer of Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo to the high command in the Marianas. While the Japs on Saipan had only a tactical view of their own situation, Yoshida knew the strategic score.

Major Yoshida surrendered to us, not because he was yellow by any means, but because he was firmly convinced that Japan had already lost the war. 'It is only a matter of a very short time,' he told me, 'before Tokyo will throw in the sponge.'

"This was only the middle of 1944. But Yoshida proved to my satisfaction that Japan was licked. I presume the same sort of information was also available to General MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs in Washington," General Smith continued, "but they seemed to be blind to the facts of life and to our real opportunities.

"General MacArthur insisted that a large scale invasion, approximately the magnitude of the European invasion, was necessary to reduce Japan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and our Allies were of the same opinion, and all our plans were based upon this strategic assumption.

"But despite these grandiose concepts, I refused to believe that we would have to fight our way into the country. After October 26, 1944, no more naval threat from Japan existed. My opinion hardened as the weeks went by. The original target date for Iwo was January 20, 1945. It was moved to February 3 because MacArthur refused to release the ships we needed, although his campaign in the Philippines was as good as won. At any rate, he no longer needed that kind of naval support.

"D-Day was finally set for February 19, 1945.

"I did not know about them at that time, but two major developments in the war tended independently to bear out my own opinion that Japan could have been defeated without the conquest of Iwo. One was the decision reached at Yalta that Russia would come into the Pacific war. The other was the A-bomb, then abuilding at Oak Ridge and Los Alamos. Here we had three trump cards—Soviet participation, the A-bomb, and Iwo. We needed one or two of them to win, but not all three. And of the three, of course, Iwo was the least important.

"It is my opinion," General Smith concluded, "that we would have won without Iwo. And without Iwo, 6,000 American lives could have been saved."

General Smith was speaking to me from the vantage point of hindsight. Whatever his views had been

when Admiral Nimitz told him to "seize Iwo," he accepted his orders without a demurrer. What with forty years in the Marine Corps, he was sufficiently tradition-bound to recognize his own place in the chain of command.

While he accepted the assignment without a word, he refused with everything he had to accept the curtailment of naval support in ships and fire. But every one of his and Gen. Schmidt's requests for additional firing time received the same answer from Admiral Turner: the Navy's schedule would provide adequate preparation without even one more day. The decision was final.

Still worse was in store for the exasperated Marines. At midnight, January 26, 1945, Admiral Spruance assumed command of the 5th Fleet and became Operation Commander of the Iwo enterprise, in fact as well as in name. The first thing he did was to organize a fast carrier strike by Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's Task Force 58 on the Tokyo area, to coincide with the three-day bombardment of Iwo. Apparently smarting from his own failure to score a decisive victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea the year before, he now had his heart set on making this strike the most spectacular naval effort of the war and, indeed, the culmination of his own career.

General Smith was nonplused. He expected Mitscher's Task Force to aid the Iwo operation, but now even this hope—for it was little more than that—went up in smoke. Still the cup was not full. Next, Admiral Spruance took away the *USS Washington* and the *USS North Carolina*, two of the new, 16-inch-gun battleships which represented the backbone of what Smith called "the niggardly allotment of fire," and assigned them to Task Force 58 for the strike against the Tokyo area.

Then even Admiral Turner voiced protest. Admiral Spruance signalled back his apologies, pointed out the historic importance of the strike, expressed his regrets—and allowed no change in the arrangements.

This was the situation on D-minus 8, when the huge expeditionary force was already deploying for the invasion. On that February day, Gen. Smith produced his last trump card, hoping against hope to make the admirals see the light, and to get from them whatever increase he could in naval gunfire. His trump card was a bitter memo from Col. Dudley S. Brown, his chief of staff.

"Naval gunfire has been so weakened," Col. Brown wrote, "as to jeopardize the success of the operation. Certainly, under the present plan of support, assuming that the initial landings are successful, the cost in Marines killed will be far greater than under the plan agreed upon before our departure from Pearl Harbor."

Even this prophetic memo failed to make the slightest dent.

Admiral Spruance sent back a signal that, in the light of subsequent events, seems truly fantastic.

"I regret" he wrote, "*this confusion caused in your carefully-laid plans, but I know you and your people will get away with it.*"

It was with a huge armada to be sure, but one that was woefully reduced in fire power, that the Navy deployed for the Battle for Iwo Jima. Upon arrival at the objective, the remaining big battle wagons—all of them pre-World War II, old battleships—came under the direction of Admiral Blandy, one of the best friends the Marines had in the Navy. Blandy was on the *Estes*, doing the best he could. But decisions on the spot were in the hands of Turner on the *Eldorado*. And the final decision was with Spruance, who was nowhere near Iwo Jima. His mind was preoccupied with that "historic strike" against Tokyo.

One lie engenders another—once committed, the liar has to go on in his course of lying; it is the penalty of his transgression
—Jacox.

Firing commenced at 0800, on February 16, 1945—on D-minus 3, exactly as the admirals wanted it. The weather was dismal, the ceiling low, visibility almost nil. All firing schedules had to be thrown overboard. The shelling became sporadic and intermittent.

At the end of this first day's firing, damage to the enemy's installations appeared negligible. One day down. Two to go.

The weather improved on D-minus 2 and the softening up fire now seemed to have accomplished considerably more than on the day before. But the last day of preliminary naval gunfire began with the job far from finished. Then on D-minus 1, visibility again deteriorated. Observers and spotters found their task almost impossible because of a low ceiling. Frequent light rains during the day further interfered both with the firing schedules and observations.

During rare moments when Iwo became visible, all the observers could see was that the bombardment had been a flop. But in the evening on February 18, the softening-up phase had ended. Blandy's heavy units had withdrawn from Iwo, their job far from accomplished. Due to the intermittent nature of the bombardment, and the unduly frequent pauses between periods of shelling, *their allotted ammunition was not expended.*

Now, on the very eve of D-Day, both photographs and reports indicated that by and large Iwo's defenses remained intact. Confusion was rampant on the *Eldorado*. It became compounded by a message from Admiral Spruance. Apparently alarmed

by the patently negligible results of the bombardment, Spruance now amazed Blandy by authorizing him to defer the landings "if the required reduction of targets (had) not (been) accomplished."

The solution of the thorny dilemma was abandoned by the Operation Commander. Turner and Blandy became truly the men on the spot. Blandy equivocated. One more day of bombardment, he advised Turner, could find and destroy additional installations; but *if necessary*, he added, landing could be accomplished as scheduled.

By then Admiral Turner was on pins and needles. Sporadic raids by Kamikaze planes wrought havoc with some of his units, and he was apprehensive that more of the same was on the way. While Smith and Schmidt waited with bated breath, knowing full well what was waiting for their Marines after this dismal pre-invasion bombardment, Admiral Turner announced his decision:

He ordered the execution of the assault plans without modification. The preliminary bombardment phase was finished. D-Day for Iwo Jima remained as set, February 19, 1945.

The Marines were sent into an island whose major defenses were totally unknown to us, and those which were known remained largely intact. In this single sentence is wrapped up the tragedy of Iwo Jima.

Years later, General Smith summed up the grave event for me.

"At Iwo Jima," he said, "I asked for ten days' bombardment, and had to compromise on only three days' fire, to prepare for the Marine landing on perhaps the strongest fortified island in the world, where every yard of volcanic terrain was covered by Japanese guns.

"The Navy idea of battle economy often reached unbelievable proportions. After our series of amphibious successes, the Navy began to wonder, I think, if they were giving us too much gunfire. Perhaps the Marines could get along with less, they thought. One of my biggest and most hopeless fights with Admiral Nimitz, and with almost every other admiral associated with me in this operation, was to get them to see my viewpoint on naval gunfire.

"In the case of Iwo Jima I completely failed to sway them. At Tarawa, they could not take out the visible defenses. But on Iwo, the defenses were *invisible*. They needed so much more pounding, but we were given so much less! It was enough to drive one insane!

"If the Marines had received better cooperation from the Navy, our casualties would have been lower! More naval gunfire would have saved many lives!"

Old Howlin' Mad, who had resorted to prayer on the night before the invasion, trying to get from Divine Providence what he failed to obtain from the admirals, was thoroughly

and eloquently disgusted. He stayed put during the campaign, but the moment the island was declared occupied, he left the scene of his gravest disillusionment.

The war was not over yet. His Marines had still another hard nut to crack—Okinawa. But Smith had had enough. He no longer had the strength to haggle with the admirals; and he refused to serve under an Army general, and under MacArthur in particular.

He was going home to retire. But he ran into a new battle.

When stories about the heavy casualties on Iwo leaked out, an avalanche of anguished protests came down upon the Pentagon. The big brass of the Marine Corps was to bear the brunt of this home-front assault, and General Smith was singled out as the man primarily responsible for the massacre.

In his rumpled utility greens, looking at you with a sardonic smile from behind old-fashioned, steel-rimmed glasses, the stocky, old Marine looked more like a permissive father who could not slap the behind of a certified brat. In actual fact, Smith was spectacularly tough, with a quick temper, a colorful vocabulary, and an innate flair for dramatizing his volcanic eruptions.

Already, in 1906, when he was a mere lieutenant in the Philippines, leading his company of Marines on nothing worse than long cross-country hikes, he was hung with his nickname, "Howlin' Mad." That sobriquet was to haunt him for the rest of his life. It became responsible for his fierce reputation in World War II, and now it made him the obvious scapegoat. To top it all, he got a new nickname in the process—they started calling him the "Butcher of Iwo Jima."

Old Howlin' Mad retired in July 1945, a month before V-J Day. He was allowed to go without the fanfare that was accorded all the other great military leaders of the war, even George S. Patton, the Army's stormy petrel, the other blood-and-guts general of World War II.

General Smith was snubbed and humiliated. The man who led the Marines most of the way on their triumphal march to Japan was not even invited to witness the surrender ceremonies on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

In 1949, he published his memoirs, *Coral and Brass*, hoping to vindicate his sword with the pen. But his charges were dismissed as the usual apologia of a frustrated military man. Admiral Spruance, who bore the brunt of his ire, never even deemed it necessary to dignify old Howlin' Mad with an answer.

Spruance was a brilliant naval leader, with a muted temperament and a highly intellectual turn of mind. He did not dazzle with his undoubted competence. He set no emotional fires, as did Bull Halsey, with any pilot lights in his own soul. He was a re-

served and pedantic man who relaxed by himself, in the seclusion of his quarters, listening to classical records which always accompanied him to sea.

He was a gray man, his virtues and faults so camouflaged as to attract no attention, start no controversy. Yet this same man was responsible for the two of the greatest controversies of the Pacific war—one, over the failure to exploit to the fullest measure our victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea; the other, over our heavy losses in the Battle for Iwo Jima.

In the Iwo battle, it was not what Spruance did that unleashed the flood-gates of blood. It was rather what he failed to do. In a sense, it was not his fault. Admiral Spruance was a man of the Navy. An engineering officer by training, he rose from ensign to full admiral. From his first job as an inspector of machinery in a Navy

Yard to his last big wartime job as over-all commander of the occupation of Okinawa, he never had an hour's experience in *warfare on land!*

And yet, in the Iwo operation, he was the supreme commander of a delicate and difficult *land* war. He was the highest authority in the preparation and execution of an immense and intricate engagement whose payoff was, not at sea, but on *land*.

The Marines had to suffer and bleed from the tutelage of their naval superiors. They never suffered or bled more than when Admiral Spruance was the ultimate source of their destiny. If nothing else, their experience under Spruance and the blood-bath of Iwo Jima clamor for a change in the status of the Marine Corps and for its long overdue emancipation from the Navy's tutelage.

This is the major lesson of Iwo Jima and the legacy left behind by its glorious dead. ●

MEMO TO CONGRESS

The editors of BLUEBOOK respectfully propose that a law be enacted as soon as possible to change the statutory role of the U.S. Marine Corps; to separate it from the U.S. Navy; and establish it, as the nation's strategic force-in-readiness, an independent branch of our armed forces.

We further propose that this new Strategic Land Command be combined with the Strategic Air Command, to create a new military organization—the world's first and only Strategic Striking Force, directly under the Joint Chiefs of Staffs.

There is a precedent for such a move, as well as an urgent need. The precedent is supplied by the Strategic Air Command, an autonomous, self-contained striking force. It is now under the ultimate command-authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs.

The need is indicated by the changed complexion of warfare.

Nuclear weapons and inter-continental rockets have completely altered both the character of war and the mission of the various arms. Campaigns like Saipan or Iwo Jima would be unthinkable in this atomic age. Amphibian operations, like the landing at Inchon in the Korean War, are certain to prove either impractical or, indeed, impossible.

Strategic challenges require strategic answers on a strategic level. Lightning provocations demand lightning responses.

A special force is needed to carry the war to the enemy on land in the immediate wake of the massive counter-blow from the air. Such a force is needed to be in a permanent state of combat readiness, as is the Strategic Air Command.

It has to be superbly mobile and flexible, and sufficiently compact to permit absolute maneuverability. It has to be imbued with exceptional fighting spirit and unquestioning discipline. It must be commanded on the strategic level, by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs under the President.

The United States has such a force virtually ready-made.

It is the United States Marine Corps.

It is the ideal force-in-being to be turned into our Strategic Land Force, to supplement the Strategic Air Command, and to amplify manifold our striking potential.

The lessons learned on Iwo Jima—and described in the foregoing article—are among the powerful arguments that motivate our recommendation. The facts of survival in the atomic age, and the pressing needs of the new face of war supply the rest.

The Marines deserve better by us! We must give them what they need, and more than just the tools of war! We must give them their proper command organization and strategic autonomy!

Then we can rest assured that, no matter what the odds, they will always finish the job.

But we have to act *now!* Our country's future, the world's future, our own future—yours and ours—may depend on what you do.

The Editors