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The battle of Iwo Jima.

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16 February 1955

From: Assistant for Public Information
To: Chief of Naval Operations
(Director of Naval History)

Subj: Account of the Battle of Iwo Jima, Forwarding of

Enc: (1) Subject account

1. Enclosure (1) is forwarded herewith for appropriate disposition.

E. F. McDEVITT
By direction

Iwo Jima
Tuesday, 20 Feb. '45

We made Pearl Harbour after an uneventful trip. Other than a little rough weather now and then it wasn't bad at all. We were at Pearl for 5 days, all of which I spent at home. It was great to be back again. Several of the boys that I went around with happened to be in the Islands while I was there, so we had a nice get together. Two of my classmates from Pratt were there at the same time. They called up different times not knowing that I was home, so they were quite surprised when I answered the phone.

We left Pearl in a rush, not knowing, but suspecting that something big was up, and just made Saipan as the convoy for the Iwo Jima operation was forming up. We arrived there in the morning and left in the afternoon.

We had excellent cover and protection on the way. On D-1 it rained and the visibility was about zero, so we were able to get quite close to the island with good cover. On the morning of D-day the weather cleared beautifully. It was still dark as we made our approach, but you could see the bombardment still going on. The fleet was really pouring it on. The whole island seemed to be exploding.

As dawn broke, you could make out "Hot Rocks", an extinct volcano on the southern extremity of the island. It looked like a gigantic loaf of bread on one end of a huge pancake.

The bombardment continued until about 0900, and then the planes started making their run. First came the heavy Liberators, and when the bombs hit, the island seemed as if it were rising out of the sea. You wondered how anyone could have lived after the naval bombardment and that if any had been missed, this would surely take care of them, but it didn't. Hot Rocks was honeycombed with caves and fortifications, as were all the cliffs that overlooked the beaches. Even the dive bombers and rocket planes which pin pointed any of the fortifications that were missed didn't get them all, nor did the hundreds of fighters that strafed the island from end to end do it.

After the bombardment by air, the rocket ships, motor ships and gunboats went in. (They are all converted LCI's). They launched thousands of rockets and mortar shells, and then the marines went in. We could see them racing up the beach from the little LVT's, LVP's and Higgins boats, but not many from the first wave made it. The going must have been pretty tough for those boys, for the battleships, cruisers and destroyers all opened fire on Hot Rocks and the beaches again. The Jap fire from Hot Rocks was pretty bad, for battleships were firing at it with 16" shells from point blank range. From where we were you could see the caves and the shells exploding around and even in them.

LCI's were sent ashore with the next wave and carried tanks. They seemed to help a little, but the volcanic ash on the island seemed too soft, and the tanks started throwing their tacks as soon as they left the LCI's. When the tanks started moving up from the beach, they left half their number behind. Some hit and some without tracks.

By that evening, between 30 and 40 thousand marines were put on the beaches, but it didn't look good. Dive bombers, rocket planes and fighters hit the island all day and only stopped when it got too dark to see our own troops. However, the naval gunfire continued all day and all through the night. Some of the ships were within 1000 yards of the beach, including battleships of the latest class and some salvaged from Pearl Harbour. The little gunboats were so close to Hot Rocks that it looked as if they were throwing hand grenades into the caves to support their rockets and 40 mm fire.

The ships turned the night into day with their star shells so that no surprise counter-attack could be made, and at no one time was the sky ever without them. The gun fire seemed to be heavier during the night. You could see the tracers racing for the island, one on the tail of the other, and the HE shells from the warships literally covered the island at times. You could see them leave the muzzles of the guns, follow them right to the island and then see them explode. At times there were dozens of fires on the beaches, and once in a while an ammunition dump or a gasoline dump would be hit. Since there was no front line, you couldn't tell whose ammunition or gasoline was going up in smoke. It looked just like the 4th of July then, and not a war.

I am writing this on the afternoon of D plus 1. This morning, the marines held in reserve were sent in, and the fleet continued its bombardment. There were just twice as many planes in the sky as the day before. However, in spite of everything, it looks as if we are making progress. The Jap still has artillery and it must be very cleverly hid, for the big guns from the ships haven't been able to get all of it. Their little mortars are terrible. I believe they have been causing more trouble than anything else. We have been very lucky so far. All that have come our way have missed us. Some were a little too close tho, and when they got our range we executed that well known naval maneuver called "getting the hell out of there".

I have written this during noon chow and it is time I was back on deck. Besides, my curiosity is getting the better of me. I can hear all the gun fire, but I want to see whose it is, and where it all lands. They tell me the only ones that you should worry about are the ones that you can't hear. All for now.

Friday, D plus 4

This is the morning of D plus 4. It has been a great morning too, for Old Glory was finally planted on the top of Hot Rocks. I imagine the marines are calling it "Old Gorry" by now. Hot Rocks (Mt. Suribachi) has been under a 24 hour land, sea and air bombardment since D-day. It was terrific. Early this morning we could see the marines advancing on the extinct volcano which has hundreds of fortified and hidden caves. They advanced in small units of 6 or 8 men with a flame thrower, and smoked the Japs out of their caves. At about 0800 we could see a small group of marines climbing Hot Rocks. The going was almost straight up and down, and they looked like ants climbing a wall. They would crouch down behind rocks occasionally, fire for a few minutes and then advance again. Suddenly, while we watched this same group of marines, we noticed thru our glasses a group of men on the top of Mt. Suribachi, and immediately afterwards we saw our flag flying. Everyone was really proud of that. There was no cheering tho. Everyone was too busy ducking. More marines arrived on the mountain and a general advance was begun around the rim of the volcano.

They were silouetted against a blue sky, and you could see the action beautifully. At one time after going forward about 200 yards, they all raced back for cover, and you could see mortar shells bursting amongst them. One man started to crawl forward and then suddenly jumped up and swung his arm. There was a puff of smoke and the advance started again. Another cave had been cleared out. By noon the top had been cleared, but the sides still remain in Jap hands. Not for long I don't imagine.

Yesterday the second air field was taken, but the show is only half over. The northern half of the island is still in Jap hands. It is proving hard to take, for it too is covered with caves and pot-holes cleverly concealed. Each cave taken means an individual battle fought.

Our casualties seem to have been heavy. There have been many hospital ships off shore. The radio reports 3600 the first 48 hours. We get reports from the beachmaster by voice radio, so we get a good bit of information as to how the battle is going. I have seen hospital ships within 500 yards of the beach evacuating the wounded.

We have been operating about 200 yards off the beach all morning, so we have been able to see a great many of the difficulties that the marines have had to contend with.

The navy has put a tremendous amount of material ashore under the most difficult beaching conditions. Our job here is the direction of LCT's, causeways, and pontoon barges which are unloading the ships. They use them until the beach is secure, then send the LST's and LAM's right up to the beach to unload.

The soft volcanic ash is making it difficult to get the armoured equipment and guns ashore. Hundreds of tanks, trucks, LVT's, small boats and ducks have been wrecked or else blown up by artillery and mortar fire on the beach. At one time all unloading had to stop because of the wreckage on the beach. 30 cranes were unloaded that night and put on the beach to clear away the wreckage. Steel matting put down on the beach is helping a lot.

We heard yesterday that the navy underwater demolition teams lost 80% of their compliment. They landed on the beaches on D-2 and D-1 and pulled out a few hours before we arrived. They did a wonderful job of blowing up mines; underwater obstacles; locating and charting reefs and depths of water. That is one of the main reasons that the battleships were able to get so close to the beach.

Sunday, D plus 6

We had a wild time last night. The Japs cut loose at the anchorage with a new type of bomb fired from the shore. We understand it to be a new development called a rocket bomb weighing about 300 lbs. Quite a few of them fell very close to us during the night, but we still seem to be carrying a four leaf clover with us, for we haven't been hit yet. A number of ships were not quite so lucky tho.

Being anchored so close to the beach requires a very close anchor watch, for the Japs are sometimes in the habit of sending out combat swimmers with explosives and blowing up small craft. We shoot at anything coming close to the ship and I am becoming quite an expert with the sub-machine gun. No Japs yet tho, but maybe I'll have "my day" yet.

More reinforcements arrived this morning and were sent immediately into the beach. We have a tremendous amount of equipment and supplies ashore now, so I imagine our job will soon be over. We hold the southern half of the island now, and things seem to be getting pretty well organized. We watched the marines dynamite Japs out of caves in Hot Rocks yesterday. They really are methodical in the way they go about it. About 10 men will creep up on a cave from all sides, toss a couple of grenades to make sure no one is looking out, and then advance the rest of the way with sub-machine guns firing into the cave. One marine then gets up to the corner of the cave, tosses a couple of sticks of dynamite with short fuses into it and then they all run for cover. In a few seconds there is a neat explosion. No more cave and no more Jap.

I heard yesterday that the marines have a new name for Iwo Island. To them it is now "Hell Island", and from what I have seen, they aren't far wrong.

Tuesday, D plus 8

We left "Hell Island" at noon today, and are headed back to Saipan. Not for long, I imagine. Our next trip will probably be in another direction and a new theatre altogether.

Before we left Iwo, we saw the first American planes land on that island. They were tiny marine observation planes flown off of an LST by means of an ingenious set-up called "Brodie" gear.