
HIGHS AND LOWS OF INVASION OF IWO JIMA

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A brief history of the Pacific campaign in World War II will show that America was at peace on December 7, 1942*, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Following this debacle, the Japanese were devoted to the conquest of all Pacific strongholds. Each battle was important and the Japanese had one victory after another until the battle at Guadalcanal. As a result of heroic resistance at Guadalcanal, the strategists changed their outlook from defense to offense and began invading and retaking those islands in possession of Japan. Generally speaking, by January, 1945, America had taken all Pacific islands and strongholds except Okinawa and Iwo Jima, and the main islands of Japan. The invasion of Okinawa began April 1, 1945, and was secure by July, 1945. Already, the detailed plans for the invasion of Japan by America had been drawn up in a coded document called "Operation Downfall" and "Operation Coronet." Very few people were knowledgeable as to the top secret invasion plan of attack with the code name of "Operation Downfall" and "Operation Coronet" or to the mighty counter invasion plans by the Japanese.

In this setting, American pilots of bombers and fighters were making daily raids over all parts of the main island of Japan. The American bombers were flying a round trip from Tinian in the Marianas to Japan, but this run left no margin for error

such as refueling, wounded airmen and battle damage on the return flight to Tinian. As a result, bombers were splashing down in the Pacific Ocean. Okinawa was much further from Japan than Iwo Jima and was therefore not suitable on emergency stops. It was noted that Iwo Jima stood only 500 to 650 miles away from Japanese bombing sites, but 1,200 miles from the Japanese islands to Tinian in the Marianas. Calculations verified that bombers in distress on the return flight would benefit enormously from a landing field on Iwo Jima. Thus, was born the invasion of Iwo Jima in the Ogasawara Islands to seize the island and utilize the landing site for distressed bomber and fighter pilots.

The invasion of Iwo Jima began February 19, 1945, with 485 war ships and 7,500 Marines from the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Divisions. After 28,686 casualties, the first B29 bomber landed at Iwo Jima on March 4, 1945. During the war, 2,251 B29's landed at Iwo Jima which resulted in saving 24,751 airmen.

Before the invasion, my LCT (landing ship tank) had been placed on a skid way on the bow deck of an LST for transport from Pearl Harbor to the Iwo Jima invasion. The LST was 300 feet long and had a crew of about 100 people. The LCT was 115 feet long and had personnel aboard of one officer, the "Skipper" and the crew of 18 men. During the invasion, the LCT carried many types of cargo such as invasion personnel, tanks, ammunition, wounded personnel, hoists, fuel, bulldozers, medical

*Please note that this date was inadvertently misprinted in the originally publication. The date should read December 7, 1941.

supplies, fresh water, and artillery. The LCT carried two anti-aircraft 20 millimeter stations and numerous 30 and 50 caliber machine guns.

On the morning of the invasion, my LCT was launched off the starboard (right) side and then pulled alongside for me and the crew. By 8:00 a.m., we were ready to begin our first day of invasion operations. We first loaded 30 caliber ammunition, gasoline, and a shore crew from the liberty ship to the beach. We were in three-way radio contact with our command, the cargo ships, and our LCT. It took several days to unload the ammunition due to waifs from heavy fire from the Japanese and bad weather. Thereafter, we took on many separate cargoes as directed by our command.

Of our daily assignments, the worse was perhaps our transport of the wounded and dying from emergency hospital tents on shore to the hospital ships lying off shore. These casualties consisted of shell-shocked, mortally wounded, and dead in a typical load of as many as 40 Marines per load. Some of the wounded died during transport. There were 2,600 casualties the first day of the invasion.

Also, there were sights I will never forget such as bodies and equipment in the ocean and on the beaches, with dead bodies stacked up like cord wood outside the emergency hospital tents.

I recall that the temperature had fallen dramatically. We left Pearl Harbor in balmy weather on January 22, 1945, crossed the International Date Line on January 27, 1945, arrived at Eniwetok (Marshall Islands) on February 3, 1945. On February 5, 1945, we left Eniwetok and headed north for Siapan (Marianas Island). We arrived at Siapan on February 10, 1945, and on February 13, 1945, began the assembly of the armada that would attack Iwo Jima. It

was getting much colder with freezing rain. On February 18, 1945, the temperature was freezing, it was raining, and there were high seas. The invasion began on February 19, 1945, in this threatening weather.

Curiously, the next most memorable time at Iwo Jima was the raising of the American flag on Mt. Surabachi, a partially extinct volcano 560 feet above sea level. It was February 23, 1945, and my LCT and crew were aboard a floating dry dock for repairs of damage suffered during the first few days of the invasion. At 10:30 a.m., I saw "old glory" blowing in the breeze atop Mt. Surabachi. Looking back today, I was astonished at the morale boost this sight brought me. The fact that a second flag obtained from LST 779 was raised in the place of the first flag at 12:00 noon was not noticed or known.

As a result of multiple damages, my LCT was in dry dock until March 4, 1945. This was the same day that I first saw a B29 land on this important island.

Finally, the typhoon which came in on April 3, 1945, was truly frightening. I had never seen wind and waves of this intensity.

We left Iwo Jima for Siapan on May 23, 1945, and we arrived on May 27, 1945, and on June 6, 1945, I took over command of another LCT and crew. My original LCT seemed to be beyond repair.

This is a brief recounting of my role at Iwo Jima which does not begin to tell the tale. I have simply presented the importance of this invasion, the vessel I commanded, and the highs and lows of my participation.

The Marines are still collectively and individually responsible for taking this island from the Japanese with major support of the Navy, the Army and all supporting personnel. Truly, each participant was a hero in this part of World War II.