

FRUSTRATIONS AT IWO JIMA

The following recollections and descriptions are part of the original Natoma Bay Logbook Project created in the 1970s and 1980s by John J. Sassano, historian and Bob Wall, editor.

The current document attempts to recreate, in electronic form, that original LOGBOOK of the Natoma Bay Association. I have tried to retain the exact formatting of the original paper version. Minor modifications were made when the modern word processor refused to reproduce the original typewritten format.

The entire Natoma Bay Online Logbook Project can be found at:
<http://natomabaycve62.org/logbook/LBindex.html>

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After the long campaigns in the Philippines (20 Oct. 1944 to 3 Feb. 1945) Natoma Bay was assigned to the 5th Fleet and received orders to provide air cover and prepare the assault on Iwo Jima. Arriving on 16 Feb. 1945, 3 days before D Day, we immediately began our duties of pounding the ground installations, and maintaining combat air patrol and anti-sub patrol.

The Marines hit the beach on the 19th and although we sent in 36 planes to cover the assault the Marines were being pounded mercilessly and were having great difficulties and suffering severe losses from hidden installations on Mt. Suribachi.

It seems like the underground tunnels and revetments on Mt. Suribachi hadnt been penetrated by the repeated pre-invasion bombing and were playing havoc with the Marine advances. As the casualties mounted, the support carriers were asked for some kind of deeper penetration into those cave openings on the mountain. After trying 1000-lb. AP bombs with no telling effect, we began to ponder the use of a new, little known weapon and not used by us before - napalm!

After much study and discussion on the preparation and loading of this material, we were ready to send a new kind of attack against Mt. Suribachi.

For those of you not familiar with napalm, it is composed of the precise and proper mixture of aviation gasoline and napalm powder loaded onto the wings of our fighter planes in 55-gallon fuel tanks and released on or just before the target, and explodes into an elliptical shaped ball of flame. The jelly-like substance clings to whatever it touches and will burn so hot as to melt metal. The gas that is given off by this stuff seeps downward and we had hoped to penetrate those caves and tunnels in this manner. It must have helped because the reports coming in from the Marines praised the system and made continued advances during these napalm attacks. However, we were not without our own casualties at Iwo.

Both fighter and TBM's were good targets for anti-aircraft fire, especially the TBM's. The result was that 4 of 8 Avengers were badly damaged. Lt. Comdr.

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REMEMBERING

IWO JIMA

FORTY YEARS LATER, A FORMER MARINE EVOKES THE INVASION

Morton's plane was hit twice in the starboard wing, and shrapnel wounded Radioman Bertram McDonald, of Cheyenne, Wyoming. The rupture of the main spar necessitated jettisoning the plane. Lt. Reeves had one third of his starboard elevator torn away. Lt. Wavell on his first run was hit in the port wing, he pumped his bomb bays open to make another run and this time was hit twice in the starboard wing and got shrapnel holes in the elevators. All three of these pilots brought their planes back and landed safely. Ensign McMahan didn't fare so well. After many hits, one of which set off a smoke flare and produced a fire aboard. He ditched with 5 bombs still in the bomb bay. The plane stayed afloat for 98 seconds, and all personnel were picked up by one of our destroyer screens.

Attacks on the island continued and soon anti-aircraft fire was reduced from intense to meager. On the 16th day at Iwo Jima, 8 fighters took off on a rocket-firing attack on a large concentration of enemy transports approaching Chichi Jima, an adjoining island, they made many runs on this group and during an attack on this convoy, fighter pilot Lt. (jg) J. M. Huston was apparently hit with anti-aircraft fire. His plane went into a 45-degree dive and crashed into the water. He did not survive. Lt. (jg) Huston was one of the squadron's better pilots; he was quiet and unassuming, always alert, and his keen eyes tally-hoed everything within sight. He was always first to sight aircraft and shipping. He tally-hoed the only submarine ever sighted by our squadron. He was credited with the destruction of four airborne enemy planes.

The same day (3 March) Lt. (jg) C. D. Tate's fighter went over the side on landing and he was promptly picked up by one of our destroyers. All CVE's were scheduled to leave on the night of 7 March - all bombs and rockets being expended and the island just about secured. The Marines said "we hate to see you boys leave - it was good to have you around."

At this time VC 81 had flown 2,232 sorties (7,297.6 combat hours) plus 1,616.4 hours of routine patrol in combat zones. They were scheduled for replacement now. They had put in one of the finest records of a composite squadron under the severest conditions. For this accomplishment they can be proud the rest of their lives. God bless them all!

"A soft, seven-knot breeze barely rippled the turquoise sea. . . . If ever there was an ideal day for an invasion, this was it." The date: February 19, 1945. The place: an island in the Pacific called Iwo Jima. Bill D. Ross recalls the eerie calm before the firestorm when, as a newsman in uniform at age 23, he hit the beach with 75,000 leathernecks. Their mission was to rout out some 21,000 well dug-in Japanese soldiers. After five weeks, the final toll 25,852 American casualties, while only 1,083 Japanese survived. Some 250 Americans who fought on Iwo Jima will return on February 19 to mark the 40th anniversary of the landing and take a last look. Not Ross. Instead, he's written a book about it — Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor (Vanguard Press), based on personal observations and interviews with veterans of the invasion. He shared some of those impressions with journalist Richard Bruns in a FAMILY WEEKLY interview:

In World War II, I was on my way to Europe to be a United Press correspondent, got sidetracked, and joined the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps was able to recruit as sergeants relatively young but experienced newspaper people to function as combat correspondents. We were expected to be "fighting Marines" if we had to. I never shot at anybody I could see, but I carried a lot of people back from the front. . . .

Every morning there'd be one or two or three of you in a hole. You wake up before dawn and shake the other guy and say, "You're still here?" You look at the weather and you wonder if you're going to live today, or maybe you don't think about it. You're so damned tired in the first place. You still have fear, but you've forgotten fear. Your instructions are basically to move as far forward as you can.

When you got hit, usually not far away was a corpsman. They knew what to do: stop the bleeding, give you morphine, give you plasma

and sulfa. Stretcher-bearers would haul you back to a battalion aid station [where] a doctor would look at you, write what was wrong with you on a tag, and send you back. A jeep would take you back to a hospital tent.

No one knows who was the first Marine killed on Iwo Jima, but Lieutenant Harry L. Martin, who rallied his troops to set up the skirmish line, was the last Marine killed, and he got the Medal of Honor. From my point of view any guy who spent a night on the line was a hero.

I think the message of my book is [about] the ability inherent in most of us to overcome fear in whatever we're doing. It is exemplified by what the Marine Corps does: the way they take a cross section of a population and weld it into one single determination. I don't think you'll ever see a battle like Iwo again, not that you won't find courageous men, your friend or your foe. But the way warfare has progressed, I don't, think it can happen again.

FW

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