Battle for Iwo Jima

A Register of Collections in the Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections

Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections Branch
Library of the Marine Corps
Gray Research Center

Quantico, VA

2009
Introduction

The Marine Corps Archives is located at 2040 Broadway St., Quantico, VA 22134. Hours of operation: Monday-Friday, 7:30am-5:00pm. Phone: 703-784-4685. Email: grcarchives@grc.usmcu.edu

The Marine Corps Archives & Special Collections supports the professional military education requirements of Marine Corps residential and distance learning programs. They are the chief repository for reporting units as well as for personal papers of current and veteran Marines. The Archives is open without appointment to both military and civilian patrons, and a professional archivist is always available for assistance. Patrons have access to computers, printers, scanners, and a book copier. Patrons may bring laptops, digital cameras, personal scanners, and copy stands for use.

Administrative Information

Restrictions: Collections are open to all researchers

Preferred citation: Researchers wishing to cite these collections should include the following information:
Name of Collection, Folder heading, Collection Number, Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections, Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA.

Historical Note

Iwo Jima on its own is almost valueless. It is covered in sulphur and only measures a few miles around. However, by 1945, the Japanese had already built two airfields used in attacking Saipan and were building a third. If the Americans could capture the island, Iwo Jima could serve as a base for bombers raiding Japan which was only 650 miles away.

D-day for the assault upon Iwo Jima was set for 19 February 1945. The troops who were to participate in the assault included the 4th Marine Division (23d, 24th, 25th, and 14th Marines) led by Major General Clifton B. Cates, and the 5th Marine Division (26th, 27th, 28th, and 13th Marines) led by Major General Keller E. Rockey. The 3rd Marine Division of V Amphibious Corps (3d, 9th, 21st, and 12th Marines) led by Major General Graves B. Erskine was designated as Expeditionary Troops Reserve. Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith, assigned the post of Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, had overall responsibility for the conduct of the fighting ashore.

At first, there was little resistance to the Marines landing, but as soon as they tried to cross the area just beyond the landing beaches, the troops were hit with machine gun and rifle fire coming from concealed emplacements. The Japanese had constructed an elaborate tunnel system throughout the island from where they could fight off the Americans without being detected.

By 22 February, the 28th Marines had surrounded Mount Suribachi. The next day, a small patrol was sent to find the best route to the top of Suribachi. When they reached the top, they raised an American flag which was photographed by Sergeant Louis
Lowery. Shortly after this, another patrol was ordered to replace this flag with a larger
one. The image of this event was captured by Joe Rosenthal and became the most iconic
symbol of the Marine Corps.

While the capture of Mount Suribachi was going on, a push towards the north was
also taking place. The Japanese resistance to these units was intense. On 24 February
there was a naval and artillery bombardment. 5th Division tanks were able to attack along
the western side of the airfield while the 4th Division armor attacked along the eastern
side. By the end of the day, a dozen tanks were able to reach the airfield.

The 3d Division with General Erskine landed on 24 February and started attacking
the Japanese main defense line. On 27 February, the 9th Marines obtained control of the
hills north of the second airfield. Slowly all of the Japanese hills were taken by Marines.
The 3d Division reached the seacoast on 9 March. The Japanese conducted a
counterattack, but it was too late. Organized enemy resistance was declared at an end of
25 March. The capture of the island had resulted in 17,372 wounded and 5,931 killed.

Scope and Content Note

The Marine Corps Archives and Special Collections Branch holds over 100 collections
related to the Marine Corps and Iwo Jima. This finding aid highlights some of those
collections, focusing on those that have notably unique content, are large in volume, or
are regularly used by Branch patrons.

Included in this compilation are collections that contain official Marine Corps records,
documents, and publications; personal papers collections; and photograph collections.
The personal papers collections include those belonging to Generals who led troops on
Iwo Jima as well as enlisted men’s letters and memoirs.

This finding aid does not cover every collection in the Branch’s holdings related to Iwo
Jima. It highlights select collections from which researchers may start to explore the
materials that the Archives has available on the subject.

Reference Collections

World War II: Iwo Jima Operational Material COLL/3692
Collection consists of 18 boxes of official reports. Includes operation plans; reports
of capture, occupation, and defense of the island; dispatch traffic; Civil Affairs plans;
Amphibious Corps and Division reports; administrative orders; and photographic
studies.

Iwo Jima Papers COLL/3618
Collection holds a variety of material related to Iwo Jima. It includes photographs of
the participants of the flag raising speaking in front of the U.S. Capitol for a War
Bond drive, newspaper clippings related to the flag raising and the participants in
that, and a Navy publication titled “Amphibious Operations, Capture of Iwo Jima”
published in July 1945 in which the efforts of the Navy in terms of air and gunfire
support are gone into detail.
Personal Papers Collections

Clifton B. Cates Papers COLL/3157
The Commanding General for the 4th Marine Division, the Cates Papers includes correspondence, diaries, and official paperwork related to Iwo Jima.

Graves B. Erskine Papers COLL/3065
The Commanding General for the 3d Marine Division, the Erskine Papers include correspondence, photographs taken on the island, and addresses given by Erskine where he speaks about his experiences on Iwo Jima.

Louis B. Blissard Letter COLL/1737
Collection consists of a ten page letter by Louis B. Blissard following the battle for Iwo Jima and written on 19 March 1945. Lieutenant Colonel Blissard was the Executive Officer of the 23d Regiment, 4th Marine Division, 5th Amphibious Corps during the invasion of Iwo Jima. In the letter, Blissard talks of the excitement he felt during the landing on the island which turned to fear throughout the day as he saw his Marines killed.

Robert F. Graf Memoir COLL/1053
A 388 page memoir written by Graf in 1987 detailing his experiences as a member of the 23d Marines, 4th Marine Division. An enlisted man's view of WWII, including training at Parris Island, Camp Lejeune, and Camp Pendleton, and of combat. Graf participated in all the landings of the 4th Division, including Roi-Namur, Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima, where he was wounded. Thoughts and actions are detailed as he prepared for combat, and his comrades were killed and wounded in battle, Graf remembers even the smallest details of food, equipment, training, and combat.

Louis J. Verme Memoir COLL/1931
A 21 page memoir written by Verme, a member of the 4th Marine Division. The memoir concerns his service on Iwo Jima during World War II.

Jack E. Colegrove Letters COLL/265
This collection consists of the personal correspondence of Private First Class Colegrove during World War II. Colegrove served in the 28th Marines, 5th Marine Division on Iwo Jima where he lost a leg to Japanese shellfire. There is one v-mail that Colegrove wrote while on Iwo Jima and another he wrote to his mother after he was wounded.
Photograph Collections

Raymond Parsons Photographs, 1945. COLL/3403
Official USMC Iwo Jima landing photographs taken by Earl Croft who was killed on the island. Parsons and Croft were assigned as buddies and Parsons took the film from Croft’s body when he was killed. The photographs cover landing day through 22 February 1945.

Lou Lowery Photographs, 1945. COLL/2575
Louis Lowery was a photographer present for the landing on Iwo Jima and was made famous for his photograph of the first flag raising on Mt. Suribachi. Included in this collection are photographs taken on the landing beaches, the flag raising, and many other images from the campaign.