Iwo Jima + 60
Fredericksburg, TX

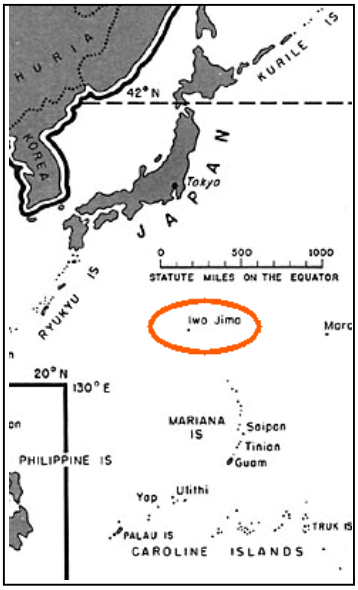
On 19-20 February 2005, the Admiral Nimitz Museum of the Pacific War, in Fredericksburg, Texas, held an event titled "Iwo Jima + 60", to recognize the 60th Anniversary of the Battle for Iwo Jima, and honor the Iwo Jima veterans and their families.

The weekend events included a parade in downtown Fredericksburg on Saturday morning, a reenactment of the Iwo Jima battle on ranch land near Doss, Texas, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, a USO show featuring the "Sentimental Journey" Orchestra on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, and tours of the Admiral Nimitz Museum.

U.S.M.C. Commandant and Fredericksburg native, General Michael Hagee, was in attendance at "Iwo Hima + 60". Also on hand was retired Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North, who rode in the parade and was present at the battle reenactment on Saturday.

The 275 U.S.M.C. and U.S. Navy veterans who gathered in Fredericksburg for "Iwo Jima + 60 remembered all too well the brutal battle they experienced 60 years ago on that infamous island.

Iwo Jima is located 760 miles from Tokyo, and is 8 square miles in size. The Japanese name, Iwo Jima, translated into English as "Sulfur Island". Volcanic in nature, Iwo is dominated by the extinct volcano known as Mount Suribachi, whose 546-foot summit rises over the southern tip of the island.



During WWII, Iwo Jima was located halfway between Japan and the American B-29 bomber bases in the Marianas. Japanese radar on Iwo Jima gave Japan early warning of approaching raids by the Army Air Force, plus Japanese aircraft staged through Iwo Jima to attack U.S. bases in the Marianas. When the U.S. Marine Corps assault on Iwo Jima began on 19 February 1945, the Marines encountered the most heavily-defended island in the world, and one of the bloodiest and hardest fought battles of the Pacific War.

By the end of the first day, 30,000 Marines had landed and fought their way across the narrowest part of Iwo to the western coast, isolating Mount Suribachi.

On D + 4, a Marine patrol reached the top of Mount Suribachi and raised a small U.S. flag, attached to a long piece of pipe. A few hours later, a larger flag is obtained from an LST, and a group of 5 Marines and one Navy corpsman are sent to the top of Mount Suribachi to raise the larger flag.

Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal accompanied these men to the top of Suribachi and captured one of the greatest photographs of World War II.

By late March 1945, after 36 days of bloody, close range combat, the battle for Iwo Jima mercifully came to an end. Of the 22,000 Japanese who defended Iwo Jima, only 216 were taken prisoner, the rest having fought to the death. U.S. casualties totaled 24,053, of whom 6,140 were killed.

For their actions on Iwo Jima, 22 Marines, 4 Navy corpsmen, and one Navy landing craft commander received the Medal of Honor. Thirteen of these awards were posthumous. Admiral Chester Nimitz, native son of Fredericksburg, spoke of the bravery of the Marines and Navy seamen who fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima, when he said, "Uncommon Valor was a Common Virtue."

Thus, the "Iwo Jima + 60" event this year had special meaning as 275 Iwo Jima veterans and their families attended. On Saturday morning, 19 February, a parade was held to start the weekend events. Despite the intermittent light rain, the streets were lined with spectators and long convoy of WWII military vehicles was well received.

After the parade, all the military vehicles and reenactors were transported 20 miles to Doss, Texas, where the recreation of the Battle of Iwo Jima was to take place. School buses and private vehicles transported Iwo veterans and the general public to the battle site. The reenactors quickly took their positions, preparing their foxholes, eating their rations, playing cards, and generally setting the stage for the upcoming battle. The public watched as the soldiers went about the daily tasks of a WWII Marine. Vehicles drove around, guys talked and visited, wrote letters and yet were ever on alert for a change in activity.

Kent Chipman, Joe Bash and I participated in the battle with my '42 Dodge WC-52 Weapons Carrier, supporting U.S.M.C. infantry. We had a .50 cal. machine gun in the Weapons Carrier, a .30 cal. machine gun in a foxhole, and various small arms including M1 Garrands, M1 Carbines, Thompson submachine gun, .45 auto pistols, and a M1A1 Bazooka.

A quad-fifty mount on a trailer fired .50 cal blank round bursts throughout the battle.

Two M4 Sherman tanks, two Stuart tanks, and three half-tracks began moving forward in support of the infantry. The flamethrowers in use against enemy bunkers were an awesome sight!

From our position, looking both left and right, it was an awesome sight to see several hundred "Marines" digging in or crouched in their foxholes, awaiting the signal to begin the assault, as enemy mortar and artillery shells exploded nearby, throwing chunks of peat moss into the air, as the gray-smoke explosions shook the stillness of the Texas Hill Country.

As the infantry assault began, machine guns and howitzers opened up with covering fire. Brent Mullins' 105mm howitzer fired numerous booming salvos.

The Japanese reenactors atop "Mount Suribachi" included 40 actual Japanese, plus several Americans, including Arrowhead Chapter members Ernie Phillips, Derek Heuring, and Peter Dawson. The battle reenactment concluded with both flag raisings atop "Mount Suribachi".

Jeff Hunt

Watching the reenactments brought tears to the eyes of many Iwo veterans as they remembered what had happened and the buddies they had lost on Iwo Jima. One Marine veteran, who lost the lower half of his right leg on Iwo Jima on Day Six of the battle, was quoted as saying that the reenactment was so realistic, and it was the way he remembered it.

Jeff Hunt, director of the Living history program at the Admiral Nimitz Museum of the Pacific War, said, "Comments like that are what we were looking for to tell us we had done it right by the veterans." MVPA Arrowhead Chapter participants in "Iwo Jima + 60" included the following.

Charles & Susan Varner
Bob & Debbie Hopkins
Joe & Dee Bash
Kent & Cindy Chipman
Gary & Linda Haas
Jesse & Amy Minton
Mark, Dixie, and Peter Dawson
Bob Coalter
Brent Mullins
John Colwell
Chuck McCarty
Tom Hill
Derek Heuring
Ernie Phillips
Bruce Stewart
Dennis Coon
Gene Smith
Carlos Manning
Jayson Davis
Mark McElyea
Andrew Haynes

There were several other Arrowhead Chapter members there as spectators. Awesome support by our Chapter!!

Our thanks is extended to Jeff Hunt and the Admiral Nimitz Museum of the Pacific War for producing such an extraordinary event to honor the Iwo Jima veterans on the 60th anniversary of that famous and historic battle.

Gary Haas

Jack Slattery and Jeff Hunt

Gene Smith

Dennis Coon

75mm Pack Howitzer

Drew Haynes

Charles Varner

37mm anti-tank gun

Jack Slattery

Brent Mullins' 105mm Howitzer

(left) Eldon Gurley (2nd from rt) Dennis Coon

Kent Chipman

Joe Bash and Gary Haas prepare for the attack

Jeff Hunt

(l-r) Susan Varner "Rosie the Riveter", Charles Varner and Joe Bash by Charles' Command Car

Gary Haas visits with the 37mm anti-tank gun crew

Ernie Phillips as a Japanese reenactor and Linda Haas pose for a photo after the battle.

Brent Mullins, second from right, and his 105mm Howitzer crew

(l-r) John Colwell and Mark McElyea with Japanese reenactors. Mark' s 1941 Dodge WC-12 Pickup was very handy for running much needed errands and transporting personnel

L-r) Dave Austin and Chuck McCarty

M16 Halftrack with quad .50 cal. mount

Brent Mullins' M5 Stuart Tank

Richard Kemp's M4 Sherman Tank (with 76mm long barrel)

Jesse Hernandez & Jim Silvers

Nimitz Museum's M3A1 Stuart Tank

Jim Silvers in a White M2A1 Halftrack

Jesse Hernandez's Halftrack

Japanese Reenactors

Japanese Campground

Capt. Fukuda gives direction to Ed Allas and Carl Householder.

(above) Type 92 Machine Gun ("Woodpecker" because of its slow cyclic rate) and two type 97' Japanese M.G.'s courtesy of the museum.

Japanese contingent marching off to get weapons drawn.

(Below) Derek Heuring and Ed Allas (American coordinator)

(left) Briefing before the battle

(below)
Japanese anti-tank gun in it's emplacement on Suribachi.

Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!

After the battle, Japanese soldiers gather for photos.
Peter Dawson (with rifle on shoulder)

Inside a Japanese bunker prior to the battle. One of the sons of the reenactors from Japan was able to make the 18 hour flight with his father for this very special reenactment.

Battle Photos

Not really knowing what to expect, I was so impressed when we arrived and saw the foxholes that had been started for the troops to "dress out" as part of their impression.

As the marines took up their positions the stage was set for battle. The public walked up and down the fence line taking note of gun emplacements, medical aid stations and the command post before the event began.

When the artillery began its barrage, the spectators quickly got in position for photo opportunities. There was so much to see that your eyes darted back and forth across the scene not wanting to miss anything. The soldiers and the armor passed right beside the crowd for a very close-up and personal view. The sounds and the smells made the spectators feel like they were right there in the action. Jeff Hunt and the staff of the Admiral Nimetz Museum did an excellent job of planning and months of work getting the the landscape exactly right.

(top right) Medic Station preparation. The wounded were transported via weasel to the main medical station.

(center) The crowd was right next to the action

(above) Sighting for the quad .50 cal

Nothing could really prepare you for the flame throwers. I knew they were a main part of the battle but as they advanced up to the summit, the vision of the yellow/ orange flames was a sight to behold. You could hear the crowd ohhh and ahhh as the flames expanded across the land. It would silhouette the advancing marines and you could only imagine what they must have gone through in 1945.

The Iwo Veterans were impressed with the realism that they saw on the field those two days and many a tear was shed. I have to take a minute to thank the reenactors that participated because it looked and sounded and smelled so real .

As the Marines flanked the advancing armor, the cameras throughout the crowd started snapping photos.

Of particular interest was the firing of the motar rounds. It was unbelievable how far and high they went. In fact, one went over the summit and landed near the Marines of the War Dog Training Patrol of Lackland Air Force Base who were to portray the Marines during the flag raising portion of the event. They pretended to fire their weapons back at the advancing forces.

(upper right) The flame throwers were very impressive to watch.

(above) There was so much activity to watch. While the forces were advancing, the Japanese were moving all about the mountain. There were counterattacks and skirmishes.

Battle photos

IWO JIMA