

SPECIAL REPORT ★ 75TH ANNIVERSARY

IWO JIMA

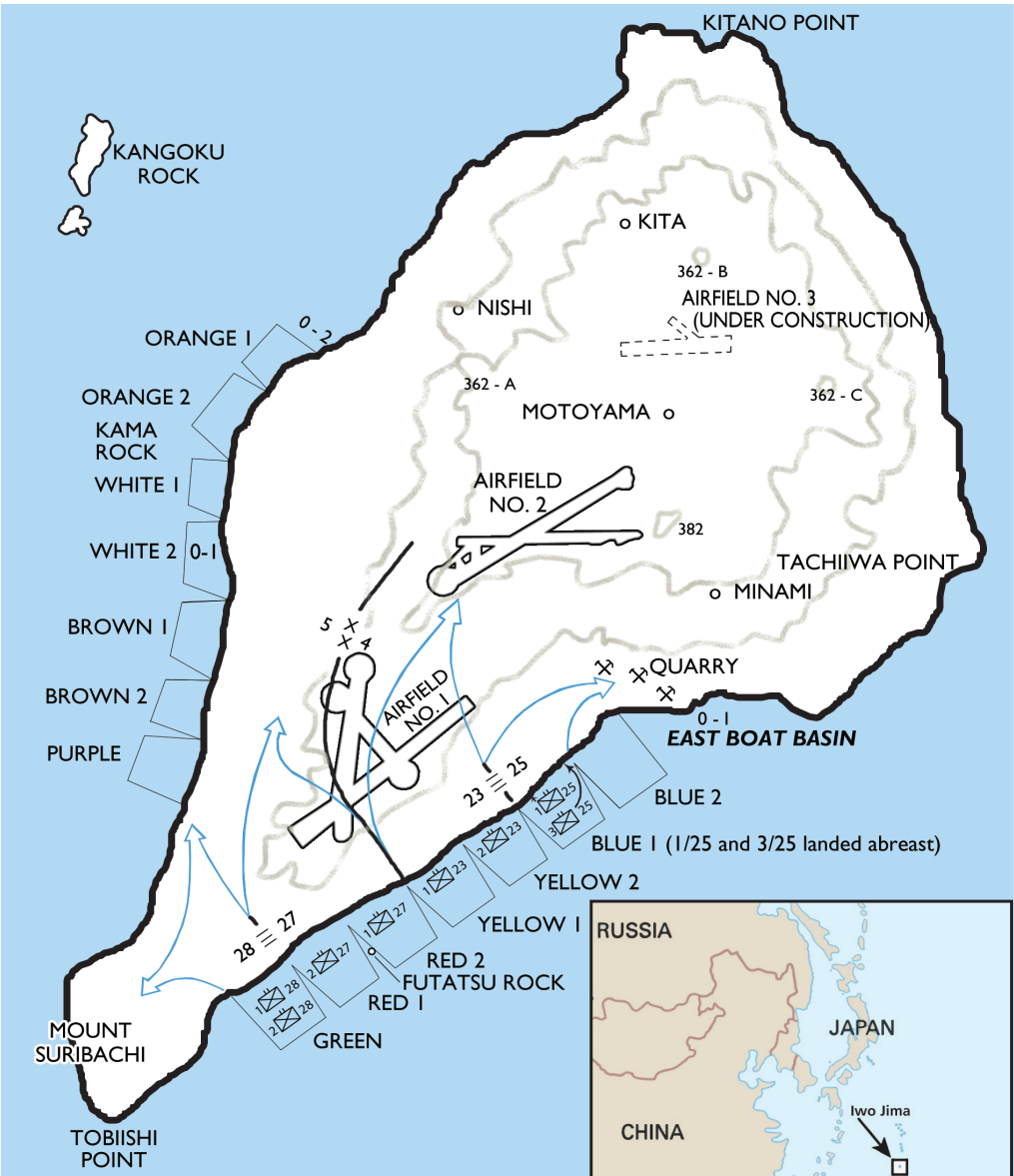
THE BATTLE

CHRONOLOGY:

- **Feb. 19, 1945:**  
Marines attack multiple landing zones on the southern section of the island and reach part of Airfield #1.
- **Feb. 23:**  
28th Marines plant American flag atop Mount Suribachi.
- **Feb. 27:**  
Airfield #2 is taken.
- **March 3:**  
Airfield #3 is cleared.
- **March 4:**  
First B-29s land on Iwo Jima.
- **March 25:**  
The last pocket of Japanese resistance is defeated.
- **April 18:**  
Last Marines leave Iwo Jima.

SOUTH, THEN NORTH:

American forces started attacking Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945, making landfall in different zones that were identified by colors. They moved southward to secure Mount Suribachi, which provided a high-ground advantage for viewing the battle. Marines eventually moved north and captured three airfields, two that were finished and one under construction.



BATTLE OF IWO JIMA  
February 19, 1945 – March 26, 1945

The Battle of Iwo Jima was the first time United States forces directly attacked territory that was part of Japan during World War II. The objective was to capture the remote island and use its airfields to launch strikes on the Japanese mainland. The U.S. invasion, called Operation Detachment, began on Feb. 19, 1945, and lasted until March 26 – five weeks of some of the bloodiest and most intense fighting of the war across a small, desolate, volcanic island.

**PARTICIPANTS:**  
United States and Japan

**COMMANDERS:**  
Fleet Adm. Chester Nimitz (U.S. Navy), Gen. Holland “Howlin’ Mad” Smith (U.S. Marine Corps), Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi (Japan)

**STRENGTH:**  
United States (110,000 personnel, more than 26,000 total casualties, 6,821 killed), Japan (20,000 to 22,000 personnel, all but approximately 200 dead or missing)

**SURVIVOR’S SON:**  
“The battle of Iwo Jima would quickly turn into a primitive contest of gladiators: Japanese gladiators fighting from caves and tunnels like the catacombs of the Colosseum, and American gladiators aboveground, exposed on all sides, using liquid gasoline to burn their opponents out of their lethal hiding places.

“All of this on an island five and a half miles long and two miles wide. An area smaller than Doc Bradley’s hometown of Antigo, but bearing 10 times the humanity. A car driving 60 miles an hour could cover its length in five and a half minutes. For the slogging, dying Marines, it would take more than a month.”

— author James Bradley, referencing his father, John Bradley, an Iwo Jima survivor, in the book “Flags of Our Fathers”

BATTLE FACTS:

- The name “Iwo Jima” means “Sulfur Island.”
- Iwo Jima is located about 760 miles from Tokyo, covers 8 square miles and is 5 miles in length.
- The southwestern tip, Mount Suribachi, was a dormant volcano and much of the island was covered with volcanic ash and sand.
- Invading Marines struggled to get off the beaches due to soft volcanic sand, suffering major casualties from Japanese artillery.
- Marines moved off the beaches at dusk to capture a key airfield despite a banzai charge by dozens of Japanese soldiers.
- Under Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi’s leadership, the Japanese mounted most of their defenses with attacks under the cover of darkness.
- Battles raged the island’s north side for four weeks, with a Japanese garrison occupying the mountains and their caves.
- Marines spent weeks searching for and killing or capturing Japanese holdouts who refused to surrender and opted to fight.
- The Japanese had dug trenches and tunnels that they used to move around the island during fighting.
- On March 25, 300 Japanese mounted a final banzai attack. The U.S. Marines withstood the charge and declared victory the next day.
- Two Japanese soldiers hid in caves and scavenged food and supplies until 1949 – almost four years after the end of the war.
- The U.S. government awarded 27 soldiers the Medal of Honor for their bravery during the battle.



An aerial photo shows Mount Suribachi on the Iwo Jima island on Aug. 6, 2014. (The Yomiuri Shimbun via AP Images)

• West Virginia native Hershel Woodrow “Woody” Williams is the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient who served in the South Pacific and fought at Iwo Jima.

Sources: U.S. Marines, History.com, National World War II Museum

“We are sorry indeed we could not have defended the island successfully. Now I, Kuribayashi, believe that the enemy will invade Japan proper from this island. ... I am very sorry, because I can imagine the scenes of disaster in our empire. However, I comfort myself a little, seeing my officers and men die without regret after struggling in this inch-by-inch battle against an overwhelming enemy with many tanks and being exposed to indescribable bombardments. ... I would like now to apologize to my senior and fellow officers for not being strong enough to stop the enemy invasion.”

— Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi, commander of the Japanese forces at Iwo Jima, in his last radio transmission to Japanese military headquarters

Layout design by Caroline Feightner and research by Dave Sutor, both of The Tribune-Democrat



Advancing U.S. troops spot a Japanese machine gun nest ahead of them during the invasion on Iwo Jima, in February 1945. One of the men is establishing its location on the map, so they can forward the information to artillery or mortar units to wipe out these positions. (AP Photo)



U.S. Marines of the Fourth Division shield themselves in abandoned Japanese trenches and bomb craters formed during U.S. invasion and amphibious landing at Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945, in World War II. A battered Japanese ship is in the background at right. (AP Photo/Joe Rosenthal)