

My Longest Day

By Irv Grossman

The date is February 19, 1945. Reveille is 0300 in the morning! We have been on board our LST for a number of weeks approaching our rendezvous point after leaving Pearl Harbor. The target is a place I never heard of before. A ten square mile island called Iwo Jima. A scant 700 miles from Tokyo, Japan.

After the traditional breakfast of steak and eggs, we retire to check our equipment and clean our weapons. This operation would be my 4th major battle. Somehow before this I never doubted that I would survive. However, this time there was an air of apprehension hovering over me. I knew that I had to relieve myself of this feeling quickly, and I did. I found time to write a V mail letter to my mother and father. I told them that I missed them, and I looked forward to seeing them soon. But if that was not to be, they could find solace in living in a new and better world.

We go on deck to watch the heavy barrages of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and carrier planes blast the island incessantly. It seems impossible to believe that anyone or anything could survive that pounding. It is time to board the amphtracks and prepare for the 0900 landing, which we do, and proceed to circle the area. We are scheduled for the 3rd wave, but we have to wait for the point-blank shelling to end.

Then the moment of truth has arrived. A skirmish line is formed and off we go on full speed for Yellow Beach 1. There is no way to describe the feeling we all have after we lock and load and lower our heads waiting for that familiar thump when we hit land, and the ramp is dropped. Finally, we reach the beach! Out we go running for protective cover. What I saw was a clogged beach of men and damaged equipment. What greeted us was a constant barrage of Japanese mortars and artillery and gunfire, which was zeroed in our positions from the high ground to our right and the towering Mt. Suribachi to our left.

What struck me immediately were the sights, the sounds, and the smells. The sights of total confusion and the carnage all around me. The sounds of the incoming mortar shells and sounds of the dying. The smell of cordite in the air and the smells of fear itself.

Finally, we rise up and advance toward our main objective, which was Motoyama Airfield #1. We ran from one shell hole to another until we were three-quarters to our goal. Just prior to reaching the next shell hole, I heard the chatter of light machine gun fire, and then it felt as if someone hit me with a sledgehammer. Before I hit the ground, my rifle went one way, and my helmet went the other. I then realized that I was badly wounded.

At first, I thought my right arm was shot off, and I waited for the end, as the Japanese gunner kept shooting at me and splashing me with black sand. After what seemed like an eternity, Lt. Britson called out to me. I told him that I couldn't move, so he crawled out and pulled me into the shell hole where first aid was administered. We then waited for assistance to evacuate me as soon as possible.

Finally, two stretcher-bearers came and picked me up and we started off to the beach. The Japanese gunner started up again and I was dumped to the ground as the corpsmen ran for cover. After a while they picked me up and we reached the evacuation area at around 1300 hrs. All the wounded and I were laid down in a line on the beach waiting for an available landing craft to take us off the island. At about 1800 hrs., we were loaded on the craft and we took off for the hospital ship.

But as luck would have it, reports came in that Kamikaze planes were approaching. So, the ships had to pull up anchor and zigzag the area. That meant that the landing craft had to follow suit. Around 0600 the next morning I was hoisted up the ship and laid down on the wooden deck as a doctor and assistants came to administer aid. Suddenly I felt that I was going into shock and told that to the doctor. He

immediately gave me blood transfusions and then right into the operating room for final treatment.

Eleven months later, after a number of naval hospitals and rehabilitation centers, it was all over. I was going home! Almost 7 thousand men died for a 2 by 5-mile island of ugly black sand, which quickly turned red. I often wonder why I was able to come back while so many young men died there. I still haven't found the answer. Some day I hope to do so.

In conclusion, this day was the beginning of the end of the War in the Pacific. For me, **it was the day that changed my life forever**. That was just one day of my life in the Marine Corps during WWII.

This... was my longest day.