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Iwo Jima is now called Iwo To. This image depicts an aerial view of the island where a famous battle occurred during World War II. Online, courtesy Airliners.net.

A volcanic island in the Pacific Ocean, Iwo Jima means "Sulphur Island" in Japanese. Last erupting in 1982, it has a distinctive cone called Mt. Suribachi (or Suribati-yama) at its southern end.

A deep layer of coarse volcanic ash makes the island seem as though it has black-sand beaches. No natural harbors, or protected anchorages, are available for ships. Vehicles are difficult to move around on the roadless island. The soil is sterile; there is no natural water supply. Nothing about Iwo Jima makes it an inviting place to visit.

Yet, the Japanese government posted a "no trespassing" sign on the island in October of 1937. Why did those officials care about this seemingly insignificant place? What made this economically unviable speck of land so valuable that it became the most heavily fortified real estate in the Pacific during World War II?

Iwo Jima was directly in the flight path of planes trying to reach Tokyo from the mid-Pacific. The small island had radar and several working airfields. As the war in the Pacific intensified, not only were its military assets wreaking havoc on enemy planes, its warning system alerted Japanese home-island officials two hours before

American B-29s arrived.

If the Allies were to prevail in the Pacific war, they had to capture Iwo Jima. If Japan were to avoid dishonor, it had to hold the island.

Trying to understand the mind set of Iwo's defenders, we can look at another von Urach observation:

What could America and England know of the sacrificial spirit of Japan's heroes, who suicidally plunged down on enemy fleets at Pearl Harbor or the Malacca [Malay] Peninsula? At best they could only defend themselves, but could do nothing against the released power of Japanese heroes, for whom life was nothing, the greatness of their Fatherland and their Emperor everything?

It is fair to observe that perhaps Albrecht Fürst von Urach - and others - underestimated the resolve of the Allied forces, including the will and spirit of the United States Marines.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ABOUT-IWO-JIMA-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ABOUT-IWO-JIMA-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

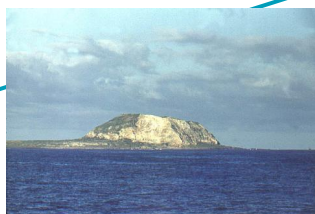
Media Stream



Map of Sulphur Island

Image online, courtesy [ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org) website.

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Mount Suribachi

Image online, courtesy [USS Wisconsin.org](http://www.usnavy.mil). The *Wisconsin* (BB-64) was a battleship which served during WWII.

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Mount Suribachi - a Distinctive Cone on Southern End of Iwo Jima

Image online, courtesy the [wikimapia.org](http://www.wikimapia.org) website.

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Soldiers Trying to Maneuver Vehicles on Roadless Island

Image online, courtesy the [ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org) website.

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"No Trespassing" Sign - Posted by Japanese Government

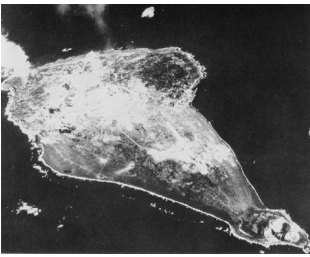
Image, from *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic*, Chapter I ("Background Strategic Situation"), page 3.

Marines in World War II, Historical Monograph - Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic - by Lt. Col. Whitman S. Bartley, USMC

Historical Section, Division of Public Information - Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. Monograph written in 1954.

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Aerial View of Sulphur Island

Image online, courtesy the [ibiblio.org](http://www.triblio.org) website.

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Photograph of American B-29

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Map of Thailand - Malacca

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons via the CIA.

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Map of Malay Region

Image online, courtesy the United States Army Center of Military History.

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