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Japanese soldiers testing equipment on Iwo Jima in January of 1945. U.S. National Archives.

We know how hard the Japanese soldiers worked to prepare Iwo Jima's defenses from letters they wrote (which were later found on the island) and from General Kuribayashi's correspondence with his family. He and his wife, Yoshie, had three children: one son (Taro) and two daughters (Yohko and Takako.)

Red Blood, Black Sand, a book of primary sources and interviews (currently out-of-print) written by Iwo Jima veteran (turned race-car driver) Charles W. Tatum - of the 27th Marines - provides information about those letters. The book also includes interviews (and hundreds of pictures) profiled in his documentary, of the same name, which Tatum produced in 1995 (and is available on DVD).

As the Japanese men endured back-breaking work, to fortify, the island, they were constantly bothered by insects. Kuribayashi wrote to his wife (on November 29, 1944):

There are still many ants, flies, and bugs troubling us and the ants crawl over us in swarms.

In other island battles, like that of Saipan, Japanese soldiers died in banzai charges. Kuribayashi's strategy for Iwo was much different. He would do his best to create excellent observation points, make the island

impregnable and then expect his men to fight until they had nothing more to give:

*For eight months before their arrival [speaking of the Americans], fifteen thousand Japanese had worked around the clock to hollow out Iwo Jima. Using mostly hand tools and at times gas masks to tolerate the putrid smell of sulfur, the Japanese created underground hospital wards, barracks, and storage rooms connected by an eleven-mile maze of tunnels. Aboveground, hundreds of pillboxes and bunkers ringed the island. Iwo Jima was arguably the most heavily fortified island in the history of warfare. (Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Into the Rising Sun: In Their Own Words, World War II's Pacific Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat*, page 221.)*

Kuribayashi made it plain to his men - many of them young, like their American counterparts - that they would die on the island. He expected all of his soldiers to fiercely resist the invaders, causing enormous losses:

*We would all like to die quickly and easily, but that would not inflict heavy casualties. We must fight from cover as long as we possibly can. (Kuribayashi, quoted by Richard Rhodes in *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, page 594.)*

The Marines coming ashore had no idea whether they would face a severe battle or whether the operation would simply be a "mop-up."

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

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

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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

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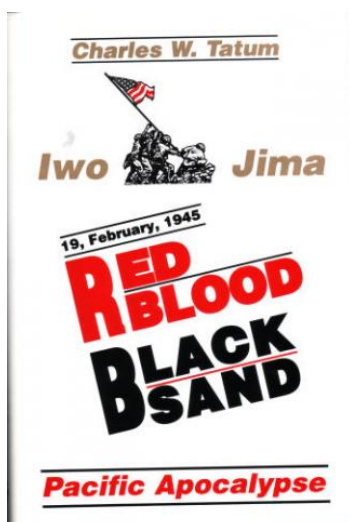


Charles Tatum, Iwo Jima Veteran and Author

Image online, courtesy the marineswwii.com website.

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Red Blood, Black Sand - A Story of Iwo Jima

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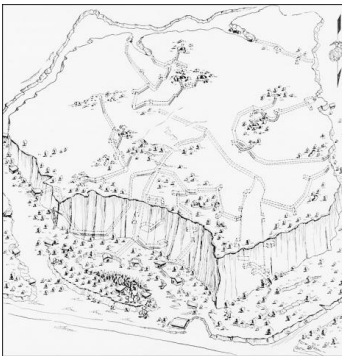
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Tatum Documentary on Iwo Jima

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Drawing of Hill by 31st Naval Construction Battalion

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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Marines Firing into Japanese Defense at Iwo Jima

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Japanese Observation Point at Iwo Jima

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