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This view of Iwo Jima, from the top of Mt. Suribachi, provides a view of the invasion beach. The photographer, Looper5920, has released the photo into the public domain.

Although the Marines who attacked Iwo Jima had practiced and practiced - for nearly a year at Camp Pendleton, then in Hawaii - this, for many, was their first real battle.

Experienced veterans, barely in their mid-twenties, remembered other difficult invasions and battles to liberate Japanese-occupied islands. [Tarawa](#), [Bougainville](#) and Saipan had been brutal stepping stones to Sulphur Island.



Light Japanese tank dug-in near Airfield Number 2. USMC photo.

As the Japanese defenders, from their excellent vantage points, rained down armament on the approaching assault teams, boys who had not yet reached adulthood dropped dead on the black sand. Buddies who had promised to look after each other were quickly separated by life and death:

- Japanese mines, and heavy artillery fire, soon decimated equipment, including troop transports (like [these LVTs](#)).
- When the defenders opened fire, their snipers [dropped Marines](#) everywhere.
- Members of the 25th Marines, attempting to move away from the beach, were [pinned down](#) by constant, accurate enemy fire.
- Loaded with equipment, [Marine communicators](#) tried to stay alive as they moved inland, from the beaches, under heavy fire.
- Navy corpsmen, assigned to the Marines as medics, had dangerous, gruesome work [at the front lines](#). By the time the [battle for Iwo Jima](#) was over, 827 corpsmen and 23 doctors were killed or wounded in action.
- Having landed at beach “Red 1,” and [within sight](#) of Mt. Suribachi, [5th Division Marines](#) were forced to [move slowly](#) over [volcanic-ash terrain](#).
- 4th Division Marines found the same [difficult conditions](#) at “Beach Blue 1.”
- During the Navy’s preliminary bombardment, sand-covered bunkers had been hard to spot. [Flame-throwing Marines](#), en route to [airfield number 2](#), had to do the job on the ground.
- As D-Day (19 February 1945) ended, the landing beaches were [scenes](#) of death and destruction. U.S. [casualty figures](#) for the first day of battle were:

Killed in action:	501
Wounded in action:	1,755
Died of wounds:	47
Missing in action:	18
Combat fatigue	<u>99</u>
 TOTAL D-DAY CASUALTIES:	 2,420

John Basilone, who'd won a Medal of Honor for heroic bravery during the Battle of Guadalcanal, was one of the Marines who attacked Iwo Jima on D-Day. Although sent back to the States, to help sell war bonds, he quickly tired of the glamour and requested a return to action. Military leaders finally agreed and sent him to Camp Pendelton.

While there, Basilone met Marine Sergeant Lena Mae Riggi. The two fell in love and married on July 10, 1944. The next month, John's orders required him to ship out. His ultimate destination was Iwo Jima where he became a D-Day casualty. His widow, who never remarried, died in 1999.

Most of the Marines never saw a single hidden Japanese during the entire battle, even while they experienced the full brunt of the island's defense system. And had it not been for Navajo code talkers, whose communications were never understood by the Japanese, D-Day casualties would have been far worse.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/D-DAY-19-FEBRUARY-1945-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/D-DAY-19-FEBRUARY-1945-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

Media Stream



LVTs Demolished by Japanese Mines

U.S. Marine Corps photo, maintained by the U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/LVTs-Demolished-by-Japanese-Mines>



Snipers Targeted Marines in Iwo Jima

U.S. Marine Corps photo, maintained by the U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Snipers-Targeted-Marines-in-Iwo-Jima>



Marines were Pinned to the Ground by Constant Gun Fire

U.S. Marine Corps photo, maintained by the U.S. National Archive.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marines-were-Pinned-to-the-Ground-by-Constant-Gun-Fire>



Marine Communicators Moved Inland Under Heavy Fire

U.S. Marine Corps photo, maintained by the U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marine-Communicators-Moved-Inland-Under-Heavy-Fire>



Navy Corpsmen at the Front Lines had Dangerous Positions

U.S. Marine Corps photo, maintained by the U.S. National Archive.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Navy-Corpsmen-at-the-Front-Lines-had-Dangerous-Positions>



Chaos During the Battle for Iwo Jima

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

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chaos-During-the-Battle-for-Iwo-Jima>



Marines Within Sight of Mount Suribachi

Image online, courtesy the ibiblio.org website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marines-Within-Sight-of-Mount-Suribachi>



Iwo Jima - Difficult Conditions at Blue Beach 1

Image online, courtesy the ibiblio.org website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Iwo-Jima-Difficult-Conditions-at-Blue-Beach-1>



Volcanic-ash Terrain Near Mount Suribachi

Image online, courtesy the ibiblio.org website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Volcanic-ash-Terrain-Near-Mount-Suribachi>



Marines in the 5th Division at Iwo Jima

Image online, courtesy the ibiblio.org website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marines-in-the-5th-Division-at-Iwo-Jima>



Lena Riggi Basilone - Widow of John Basilone

Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the "All Hands" collection at the Naval Historical Center, online courtesy USN.

The official caption states:

Sergeant Lena Mae Basilone, USMC(WR), ship's sponsor, prepares to christen the destroyer [[the USS Basilone \(DD-824\)](#)], at the Consolidated Steel Company Shipyard, Orange, Texas, on 21 December 1945. She was the widow of Gunnery Sergeant John J. Basilone, USMC, in whose honor the ship was named.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lena-Riggi-Basilone-Widow-of-John-Basilone>



John and Lena Basilone - Wedding Photo

Wedding photo of John and Lena Basilone, taken on the 10th of July, 1944. Image provided by Clinton Watters (depicted on the right), who was Basilone's best man, and [Basilone Parade](#).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-and-Lena-Basilone-Wedding-Photo>



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The War - American Anthem by Norah Jones

From the PBS Channel on YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-War-American-Anthem-by-Norah-Jones>



John Basilone - Video Biography

Video clip - including historical battle footage from the U.S. National Archives, John Basilone speaking, interviews and recreated scenes - is from HBO's [promotional materials](#) for "The Pacific." Online, courtesy HBO's channel at YouTube.

Quoted passages, about John Basilone, from [Time's March 19, 1945 edition](#).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Basilone-Video-Biography>