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Lt. General Holland (“Howlin’ Mad”) Smith was in charge of Expeditionary Troops at Iwo Jima. He totally believed in the ability of his Marines to successfully complete the most difficult missions. His men exceeded their commander’s expectations. More Marines (twenty-two) were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry at Iwo than for any other World War II battle. (A total of eighty-one Marines were thus decorated for the entire war.)



Left to right are Medals of Honor for the US Army; the US Navy / Marine Corps / US Coast Guard; the US Air Force. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Five sailors (four Navy corpsmen and one Navy landing craft commander) were also awarded the nation's highest honor for valor at Iwo Jima. Half of all the Iwo Jima medals were given posthumously.

Admiral Chester Nimitz said that "among the Americans who served on Iwo Island, uncommon valor was a common virtue." Whenever the surviving flag raisers were treated as heroes, however, they downplayed the attention. The real heroes, they always insisted, were those who had died on the island.

The following twenty-seven men were recognized by their country for conspicuous gallantry. (Click on the dates to learn their acts of heroism.) An asterisk denotes those who died in battle:

- [Cpl Charles J. Berry](#) 1 /26 USMC ([March 3, 1945](#))*
- [PFC William R. Caddy](#); 3/26 USMC ([March 3, 1945](#))*
- [Col Justice M. Chambers](#) RLT 25 USMC ([February 19-22, 1945](#))
- [Sgt Darrell S. Cole](#) 1/23 USMC ([February 19, 1945](#))*
- [Capt Robert H. Dunlap](#) 1/26 USMC ([February 20-21, 1945](#))
- [Sgt Ross F. Gray](#) 1/25 USMC ([February 21, 1945](#))
- [Sgt William G. Harrell](#) 1/28 USMC ([March 3, 1945](#))
- [Lt Rufus G. Herring](#) LCI 449 USN ([February 17, 1945](#))
- [PFC Douglas T. Jacobson](#) 3/23 USMC ([February 26, 1945](#))
- [Plt Sgt Joseph R. Julian](#) 1/27 USMC ([March 9, 1945](#))*
- [PFC James D. La Belle](#) RLT 27 USMC ([March 8, 1945](#))
- [2d Lt John H. Leims](#) 1/9 USMC ([March 7, 1945](#))
- [PFC Jacklyn H. Lucas](#) 1/26 USMC ([February 20, 1945](#))

- [1st Lt Jack Lummus 2/27 USMC \(March 8, 1945\)*](#)
- [1st Lt Harry L. Martin 5th Pioneer Bn USMC \(March 26, 1945\)*](#)
- [Capt Joseph J. McCarthy 2/24 USMC \(February 21, 1945\)](#)
- [Pvt George Phillips 2/28 USMC \(March 14, 1945\)*](#)
- [Pharmacists Mate 1st Class Francis J. Pierce USN \(March 15-16, 1945\)](#)
- [PFC Donald J. Ruhl 2/28 USMC \(February 19-21, 1945\)*](#)
- [Pvt Franklin E. Sigler 2/26 USMC \(March 14, 1945\)](#)
- [Cpl Tony Stein 1/28 USMC \(February 19, 1945\)*](#)
- [Pharmacists Mate 2d Class George E. Wahlen 2/26 USN \(March 3, 1945\)](#). See also: *The Quiet Hero* by Gary W. Toyn
- [GySgt William G. Walsh 3/27 USMC \(February 27, 1945\)*](#)
- [Pvt Wilson D. Watson 2/9 USMC \(February 26-27, 1945\)](#)
- [Cpl Hershel W. Williams RCT 21 USMC \(February 23, 1945\)](#)
- [Pharmacist's Mate 3d Class Jack Williams 3/28 USN \(March 3, 1945\)*](#)
- [Pharmacist's Mate 1st Class John H. Willis 3/27 USN \(February 28, 1945\)*](#)

While men continued to fight and die on the island, Joe Rosenthal's flag-raising picture had been developed. Recognizing the potential power of that photograph to rally Americans, military authorities sent it to the President.

Only weeks from death himself, FDR summoned the surviving flag raisers to Washington. He had a different job for them to do.

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