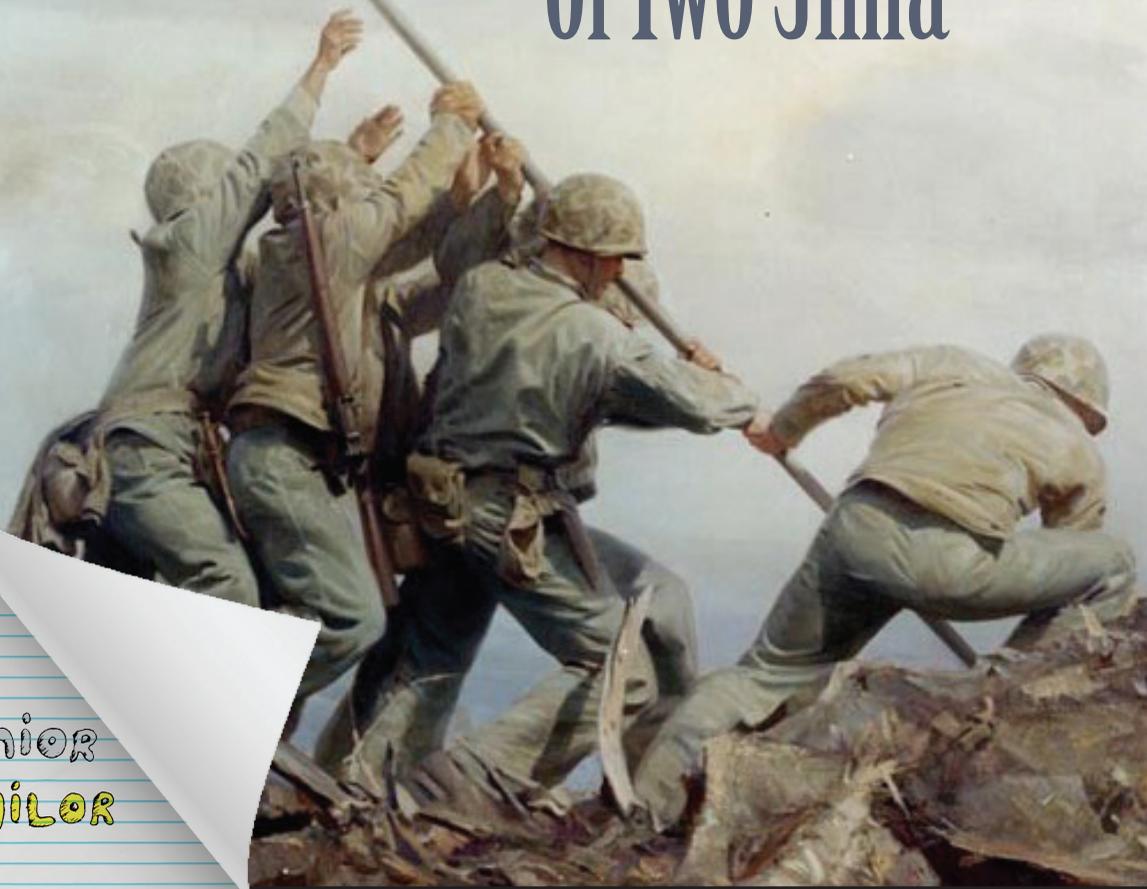




NATIONAL MUSEUM *of the*  
UNITED STATES NAVY

# The Battle of Iwo Jima



# The Battle of Iwo Jima

## February 19-March 23, 1945

Did you know?

"Iwo Jima" means Sulphur Islands, because it is located at the top of a volcano!



Leaders in the United States Navy face difficult decisions on a daily basis. From the smallest detail of life on a ship, to the execution of grand strategy of the United States in war or peace, U.S. Navy leaders have many responsibilities. To handle these responsibilities, leaders train both physically and mentally for the challenges of leadership. One educational exercise used by modern military leaders to prepare mentally is the tactical decision game. Tactical decision games make a leader look at problems in the past and think about how they would solve them.

**This packet is meant to help you think like a leader in the United States Navy and decide how to fight the Battle of Iwo Jima!**

How do I use this packet?

Look through the briefings on **terrain**, **enemy forces**, and **your forces**.

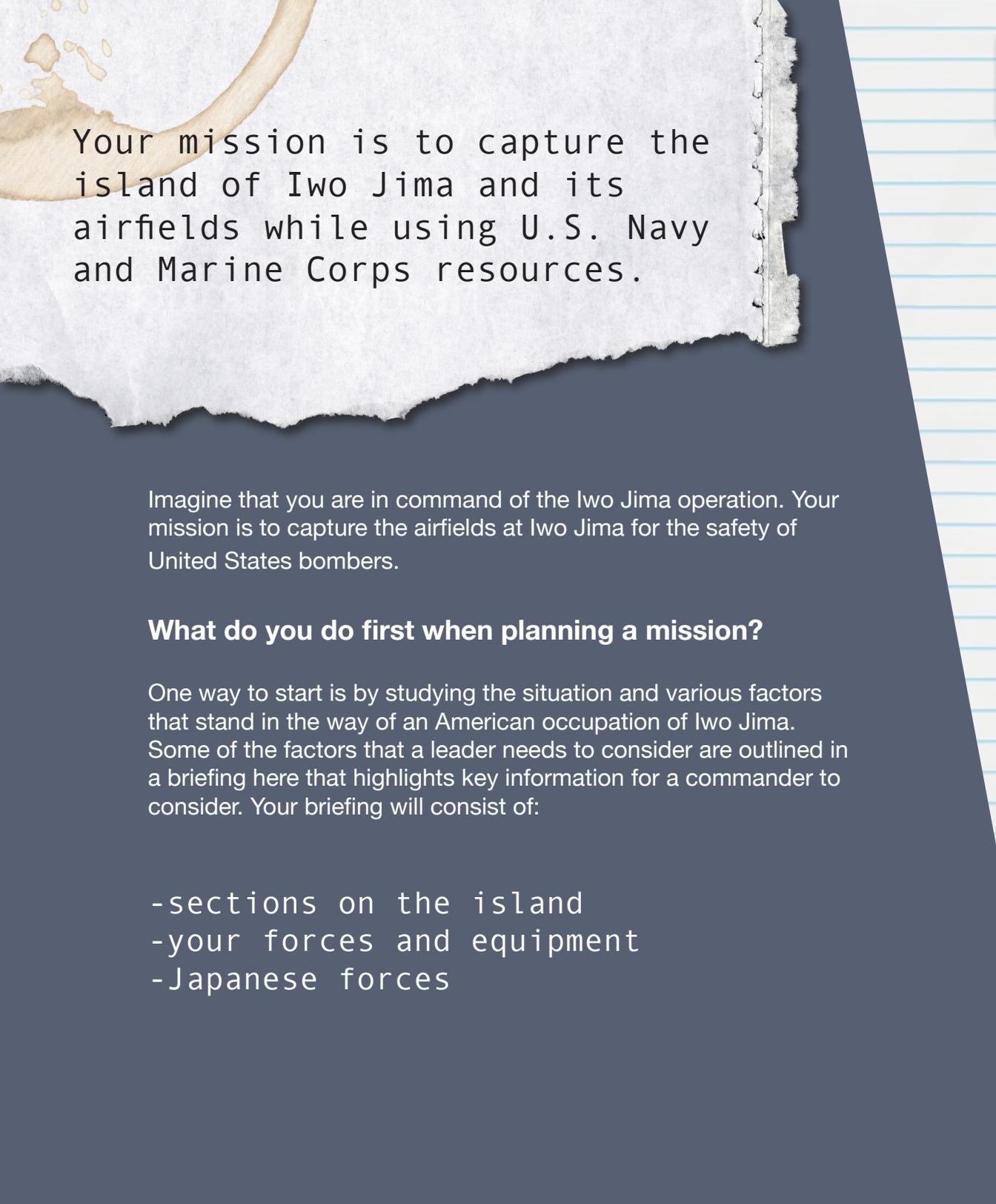
Perform a few exercises and look at real photographs.

By the end of this packet, you will have a plan for how to take the island of Iwo Jima!

# Background

World War II officially began in 1939. There were two major coalitions fighting each other, the Allies (Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union) and the Axis Powers (Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan.) The Nazis and Italians were attempting to dominate Europe and Africa, while the Japanese hoped to carve an empire in Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese started creating their empire just two years prior with the invasion of China in 1937. With their ongoing war effort, the Japanese needed resources such as oil and rubber for their military. Those resources are found on islands that were possessed by other nations including the United States. The Japanese decided to launch a surprise attack on American military bases at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii December 7, 1941 in order to deal a harsh blow to U.S. forces. The attack brought the United States into World War II on the Allied side. The fight against Japan in the Pacific involved multiple allied countries with the United States playing a major role. The U.S. military would fight the American part of the war against Japan by maneuvering from Japanese held island to Japanese held island to liberate the islands, eliminate Japanese threats and to gain a new stepping-stone on the way toward the Japanese home islands. The U.S. Navy played a key role by moving troops to these islands and fighting the Japanese Navy to gain control of the seas around the Pacific.

By 1945, American forces were close enough to bomb targets on the Japanese mainland. Between the islands where the American bombers were stationed and the Japanese mainland was the small volcanic island of Iwo Jima. On Iwo Jima, the Japanese had aircraft and anti-aircraft guns to fight American bombers that were bombing targets in Japan. They also had spotters to warn the Japanese mainland of the approaching bombers. Iwo Jima became a thorn in the side of American bombers and strategy. To save the American aircrews, and give the United States another airfield, the Navy and Marine Corps were ordered to capture Iwo Jima.



Your mission is to capture the island of Iwo Jima and its airfields while using U.S. Navy and Marine Corps resources.

Imagine that you are in command of the Iwo Jima operation. Your mission is to capture the airfields at Iwo Jima for the safety of United States bombers.

### **What do you do first when planning a mission?**

One way to start is by studying the situation and various factors that stand in the way of an American occupation of Iwo Jima. Some of the factors that a leader needs to consider are outlined in a briefing here that highlights key information for a commander to consider. Your briefing will consist of:

- sections on the island
- your forces and equipment
- Japanese forces

# the island:

The name Iwo Jima means **Sulphur Island** because Iwo Jima is at the top of a stratovolcano (a volcano made of layers of hardened lava and ash.) Iwo Jima is located 650 miles from Tokyo, Japan and is the shape of a pork chop. The Island has a surface area of approximately 7.5 miles.

The island has three main terrain features.



## 1. Mount Suribachi (Suribachiyama)

Mount Suribachi is located on the southwestern tip of Iwo Jima. It is approximately 554 feet high and is a cinder cone.

## 2. Motoyama

a large dome making the northeastern section of Iwo Jima. It is approximately 348 ft. above sea level and is flat in comparison with Mount Suribachi. It has multiple rock outcroppings and crevices that can be used by friend or foe as a defensive position or an obstacle.

## 3. Chidorigahara

a large sandbar shaped like a wedge. The sand is soft, deep and difficult to move through in some locations. The Chidorigahara region has the most accessible and lowest beaches on the island.

The picture below is a photograph from WWII taken of Iwo Jima. To help you interpret the photograph, there are labels added to the photograph by current staff. The original photo did not have these added elements.

Try to label the three major areas of Iwo Jima!

Mount Suribachi

Chidorigahara

Motoyama

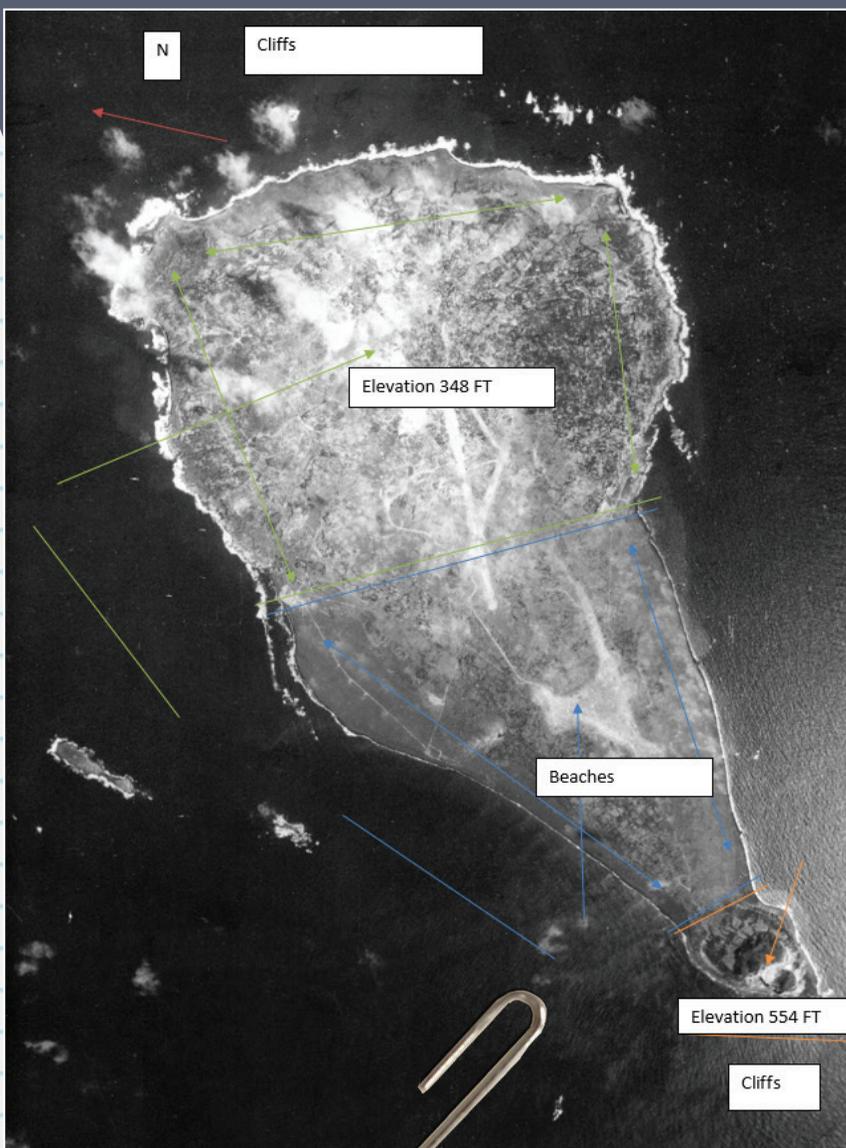
### Questions

1. Which terrain feature would be easiest for the Japanese to defend?

- a. Chidorigahara
- b. Motoyama
- c. Mount Suribachi

2. Why would that be the easiest for the Japanese to defend?

3. What are some other observations you can make based on this photograph?



Sand is a mixture of rocks and minerals divided into small particles by elements of nature. The sand on Iwo Jima is one of the most remembered features of the island by veterans of the battle. The sand on Iwo Jima is black due to the volcanic nature of the island. Sand makes movement difficult and could have an effect on the effectiveness of weapons and ammunition. To understand the sand better, try a few of these experiments.

## Experiment #1

### **Materials:**

- 1 rubber ball
- 2 buckets
- Sand

### **Objective:**

To determine the effects of sand on a falling object by dropping a rubber ball into a bucket with and a bucket without sand.

### **Step 1:**

Fill one bucket with 1 inch of sand

### **Step 2:**

Take your rubber ball and standing on a flat surface hold the ball straight in front of you over the empty bucket.

**Step 3:** Drop the ball and observe.

Step 4: Move over to the bucket with sand.  
Hold the ball with your arm straight out over the bucket.

**Step 5:** drop the ball and observe.

Which ball bounced higher?

What effect do you think the sand would have on an artillery shell landing on the beach?

## Experiment #2

### Materials:

- 1 Marble
- 1 Shallow dish or container that can hold sand and is approximately one to two feet long
- 1-2 Cups of sand
- 1 tape measurer or ruler

### Objective:

To determine what effect if any that sand will have on the forward movement of a marble by rolling the marble both on the floor and through a dish of sand.

### Hypothesis:

Will the sand have an effect on a rolling marble?

If you believe sand will have an effect, will it roll further in sand or on the floor?

### Step 1:

Place your shallow dish on a level surface and fill the bottom with sand until the bottom is completely covered with the sand.

### Step 2:

On a level surface nearby such as the floor, take your marble and lightly roll it in a direction.

### Step 3:

Measure the distance that the marble travelled.

### Step 4:

Take the same marble and, attempting to use the same amount of force, roll it through the dish of sand.

### Step 5:

Measure.

Did sand have an effect on forward movement?

If yes, which marble rolled further, in sand or on the floor?

Based on this experiment, what effect will sand have on Marines, sailors or equipment moving through the sand?



# Japanese forces:

There were approximately 20,000 Japanese soldiers guarding Iwo Jima in 1945. Many of those troops had seen some limited combat in China. There were also 23 Japanese tanks and over 60 large artillery pieces. The number of Japanese on the island is only a fraction of your force's size. To make up for lack of numbers, the Japanese forces took steps to help their troops survive longer.

The Japanese defended the island of Iwo Jima with fighting positions in tunnels, caves and other defensive positions all over the island. Fighting positions are structures built out of concrete and metal, or earth and wood that help protect a soldier while allowing them to fight their enemy in relative safety. Most of these positions were on the Motoyama or Mt. Suribachi. There were some Japanese troops on the isthmus of Chidorigahara, but the Japanese relied mostly on explosive mines and defensive positions from the other two areas of the island for defense. The Japanese were famous for massive charges called *bonsai* charges where they attack to the last man. At Iwo Jima, the Japanese decided to wait and let the Marines come to them.



PB4Y-1

A Japanese machine gun position on Iwo Jima



## Reconnaissance:

How could U.S. Forces know about the terrain and about Japanese positions before the battle? By sending service members into dangerous places to gather information. The U.S. Navy sent large airplanes (PB4Y's) and Submarines to take photographs of the island along with Army Air Corps B-29 Bombers.

## Amphibious Landings:

What is an amphibious landing? Amphibious landings are when troops based on a ship attack an enemy on land. Think the famous D-Day landing at Normandy which is detailed later on in this packet. Troops from ships boarded special landing crafts and were tasked to attack Nazi forces on Normandy Beach. There are vehicles and equipment made just for such a specialized task including the vehicles below.

Think about it:

Compare and contrast the LCVP and the LVT-2.



### LVT

The Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT) can move through water like a boat but only 7.5 miles per hour. The LVT also has treads to move on land. On land, an LVT can hit speeds up to 20 miles per hour! It is slower in the water than the LCVP. The LVTs took the first two waves of Marines and sailors in.



### LCVP

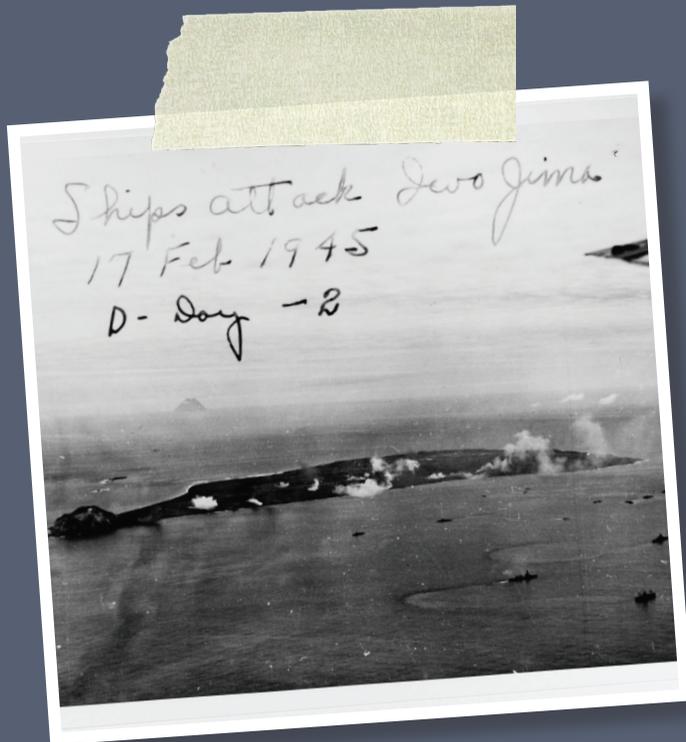
The (LCVP) moves at 14 miles per hour through the water and sits high enough on the water, with a flat bottom to get right up onto the beach. It can hold more troops and equipment but cannot move on land. The LCVP took the later waves of Marines and Sailors to the beaches.

your forces:

### Landing Preparations:

Did you know? When most people think D-Day, they think of Normandy June 6, 1944. . D-Day is actually a term for the date an important operation begins. D-Day is used as a measure of time. D-Day – (minus) two means two days before D-Day! There were several D-Days across the Pacific.

Before the Marines landed on the island, the U.S. Navy and other forces prepared the beaches for landings. This was a dangerous job since the Japanese forces controlled the beaches. How did the Navy do it? There were three main tactics. Learn about them on the next page.



### Fun Fact!

D-Day is a term for the date an important operation begins.

D-Day is used as a measure of time.

# preparing to land:

## **Preparatory Bombardment:**

- U.S. Navy battleships, cruisers, destroyers and other vessels used their guns to fire at Japanese defensive positions.
- Main battleship guns such as the 16-inch guns firing 1900-pound projectiles from the USS North Carolina fired on Japanese positions. Smaller 5-inch guns and even the 40 mm Bofors (like the one on the museum floor) were used to hammer away at Japanese defenses.)
- The Navy bombarded the beaches for three days before the landing.
- As the landing force headed toward the beach, the Navy fired explosive shells at the beach itself and as the Marines inched closer and closer, the Navy moved their fire further inland to support the Marines.

## **Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT)**

- UDTs are U.S. Navy sailors trained in advanced swimming, combat and demolition techniques.
- They were dropped off days before the battle to mark or destroy obstacles to the landing on the beaches at Iwo Jima.

## **Aerial Bombardment:**

- Planes from the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Army Air Corps bombed Japanese positions on the island.
- They also provided close air support when needed on the island.

Your briefing is now complete.  
Now for your plan. While you  
plan, we will look at real  
historic examples to help you  
decide a course of action.

Remember, the three terrain features? They are also the three key objectives on Iwo Jima. The first thing as commander you must decide is where to land your amphibious craft!

Before making your decision, let's look at history to help you solve the problem. We will provide an example of a beach landing that has terrain similar to Chidorigahara, a hilltop assault similar to Mount Suribachi and the importance of airplanes to the World War II battlefield. From there, you are to choose the order of your plan.



### **D-Day, Normandy, France June 6th, 1944 (Similar to Chidorigahara):**

Allied forces in an effort to liberate Nazi-occupied territory took part in one of the most famous amphibious assaults in history. The Allies chose the beaches at Normandy for multiple reasons. Three main considerations were:

1. The Nazi forces did not expect an attack there.
2. Sand deposits from local rivers created large sandy shores, which were ideal for landing craft.
3. Soil samples were collected and analyzed to make sure heavy machines and tanks could land on the beach after the beach itself was secure.

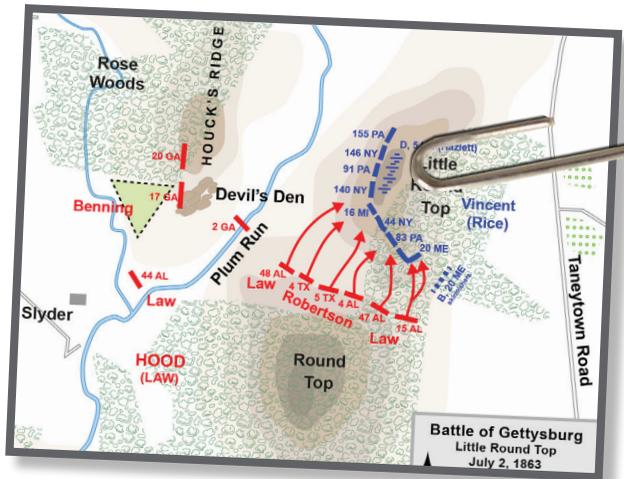
The landing at D-day costed many Allied lives, but it was successful. The Allies took the beaches and established a beachhead where they could then start moving to take back the rest of Europe and defeat Nazi Germany. Just like at Iwo Jima, there was a pre-landing bombardment and airstrikes.



## Little Round Top Battle of Gettysburg (Similar to Mount Suribachi) July 2nd, 1863 Gettysburg, Pennsylvania:

The Battle of Gettysburg is one of the most famous battles during the American Civil War. The Confederate States Army of Northern Virginia moved into Pennsylvania to fight The United States Army of the Potomac. During the battle, long lines were formed facing each other. On the far left of the U.S. line, just beyond end of their line were two large hills later named Little Round Top and Big Round Top. From the top of these two hills you could see and shoot cannons a longer distance. The Confederates also could shoot down the length of the U.S. line causing more damage. To defend against this, the U.S. Army sent more troops to Little Round Top and successfully stopped the Confederates from getting that advantage.

The lesson here is High ground is valuable. In the case of Iwo Jima the Japanese already had high ground where they could fire down the isthmus of Chidorigahara.



## Air Power in WWII, Pearl Harbor and Midway (Similar to Motoyama)

The attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan in 1941. The battles of Coral Sea and Midway in 1942 prove the importance of airplanes in WWII. Aircraft in the Second World War were used for bombing anything from enemy troops to factories that make supplies for enemy troops and beyond. As long as there is an airfield, there is a chance that the Japanese could use their limited supply of airplanes against your forces.

Iwo Jima had two completed and one incomplete airfield that could be used by either the Japanese or the United States in time.

# the plan:

What Order will you attack the objectives at Iwo Jima? Write the letter L for your landing site then 2 and 3 for your next objectives.

- \_\_\_ Mount Suribachi
- \_\_\_ Chidorigahara
- \_\_\_ Motoyama

## **Landing Site:**

Why did you choose this as your landing site?

What is the terrain like there?

What are some disadvantages to landing there?

## **Second Objective**

Why did you choose this as your second objective?

What is the Terrain like there?

What are some disadvantages to attacking this next?

## **Final Objective**

Why did you choose this objective last?

What is the terrain like there?

What are some disadvantages to attacking this last?

It is time to decide what order you will attack your objectives. Be sure to use the lessons that you learned to help make an informed plan.

# What Happened Historically?

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps chose the beaches around Chidorigahara for their landing location.. The beaches had fewer defenses and no cliffs. The beaches could also be used to land heavier equipment and tanks ashore after the U.S. Navy Construction battalions (Seabees) built reinforced roads.

The Next major objective was Mount Suribachi. The high altitude and the Japanese artillery on the cliffs were a threat to American forces. By taking Mount Suribachi, American forces secured a birds-eye view of Japanese positions on the rest of the island. An added benefit was the boost in spirits when the American flag was raised above Mount Suribachi on February 23rd. A second, larger flag was raised the same day and a now famous photograph was taken of the flag raising.

Motoyama was last, yet still important. The Japanese airfields were located there. The terrain was very rocky and difficult, and the Japanese fought hard in their last positions. The battle ended March 26th, over a month after it began, with an American victory.

## The Aftermath

Once the firing ceases, a battle is not over. The wounded and dead as well as their families still require attention. The U.S. Navy support ships and aircraft aided in the mission to evacuate the wounded to hospitals around the Pacific and beyond. The battle of Iwo Jima resulted in over 24,000 American killed wounded or missing including over 2,700 sailors. Navy flight nurses helped evacuate over 2300 wounded service members following the battle of Iwo Jima. Flight nurses also aided in the delivery of much needed medical supplies to the front.



# The Flag Raising

Have you ever been to the Marine Corps Memorial in D.C.? How about the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia? If so, you may be familiar with this famous image!



The famous Iwo Jima Flag raising photograph was not only a boost to the spirits of troops at Iwo Jima, it also was great for people back home! The photograph became a symbol for the Marine Corps, and for hope for a victory and end of the Second World War.

Symbols are powerful! They can inspire, and represent values of an individual or society. The bald eagle is a symbol for the United States as are flags and even images printed on money! These symbols often stir up powerful feelings and emotions. Think about you or your family's life. On the next page, draw a symbol that represents you or your family!

Draw a symbol that  
represents you or your family.



Why did you choose  
this symbol?

# Iwo Jima Today

The terrain of the island of Iwo Jima is quite different today than it was during the battle in 1945. Veterans of the battle have stated their surprise at how green the island is today. As you read earlier, Iwo Jima is an island formed by a volcano, which has grown significantly since WWII. As a result, the features of the island you learned about today have changed too.

Think about it!

How would the modern terrain of Iwo Jima affect your military strategy?



Thank you for learning about an important battle in the history of the United States armed forces! There are many great books, documentaries, museums and teachers that can teach you even more about the battle of Iwo Jima. Be sure to learn, explore and ask questions!



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