

Iwo Jima:

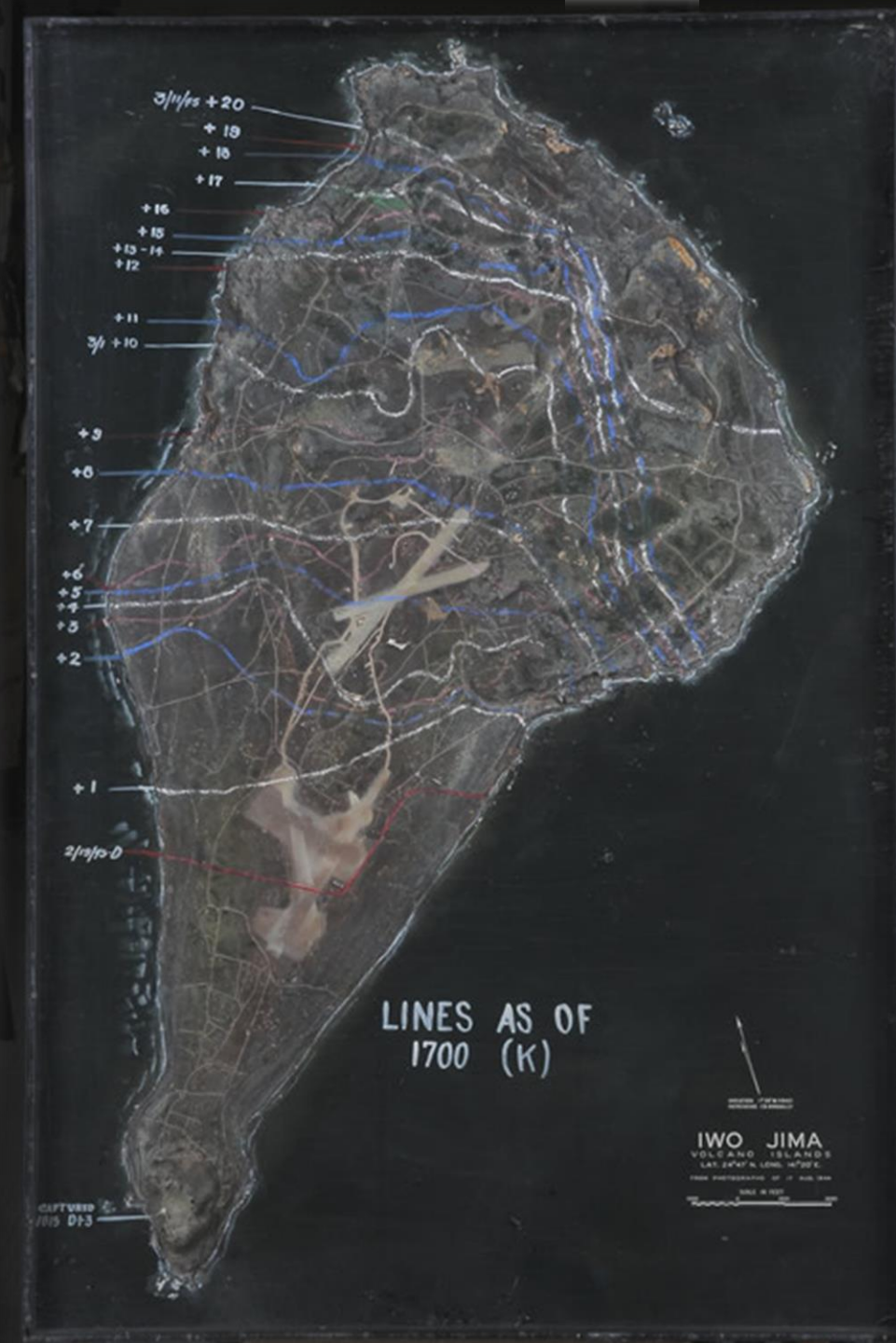
“UNCOMMON VALOR WAS A
COMMON VIRTUE...”

JOHN M CURATOLA PHD, LTCOL USMC (RET)



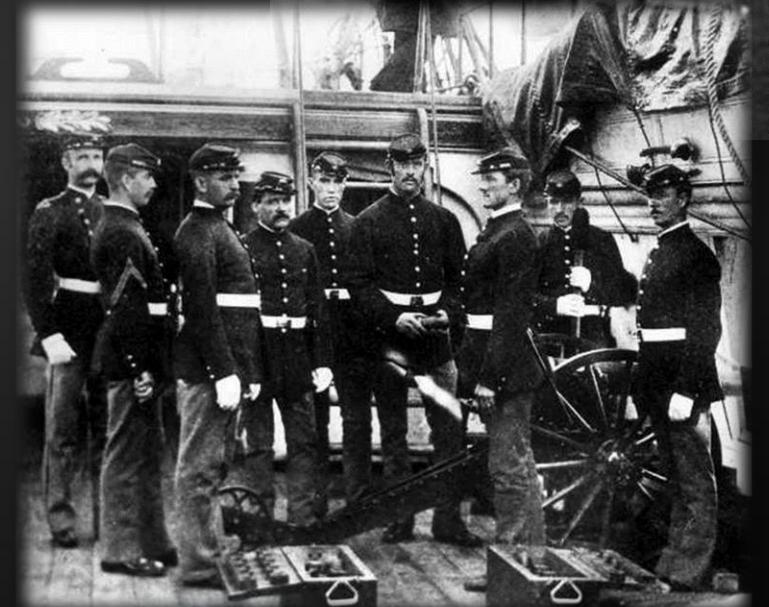
Agenda

- ▶ The Interwar Years
- ▶ Strategic/Operational Setting
- ▶ The Japanese
- ▶ The American Assault
- ▶ Northern Operations
- ▶ The Math
- ▶ Effects

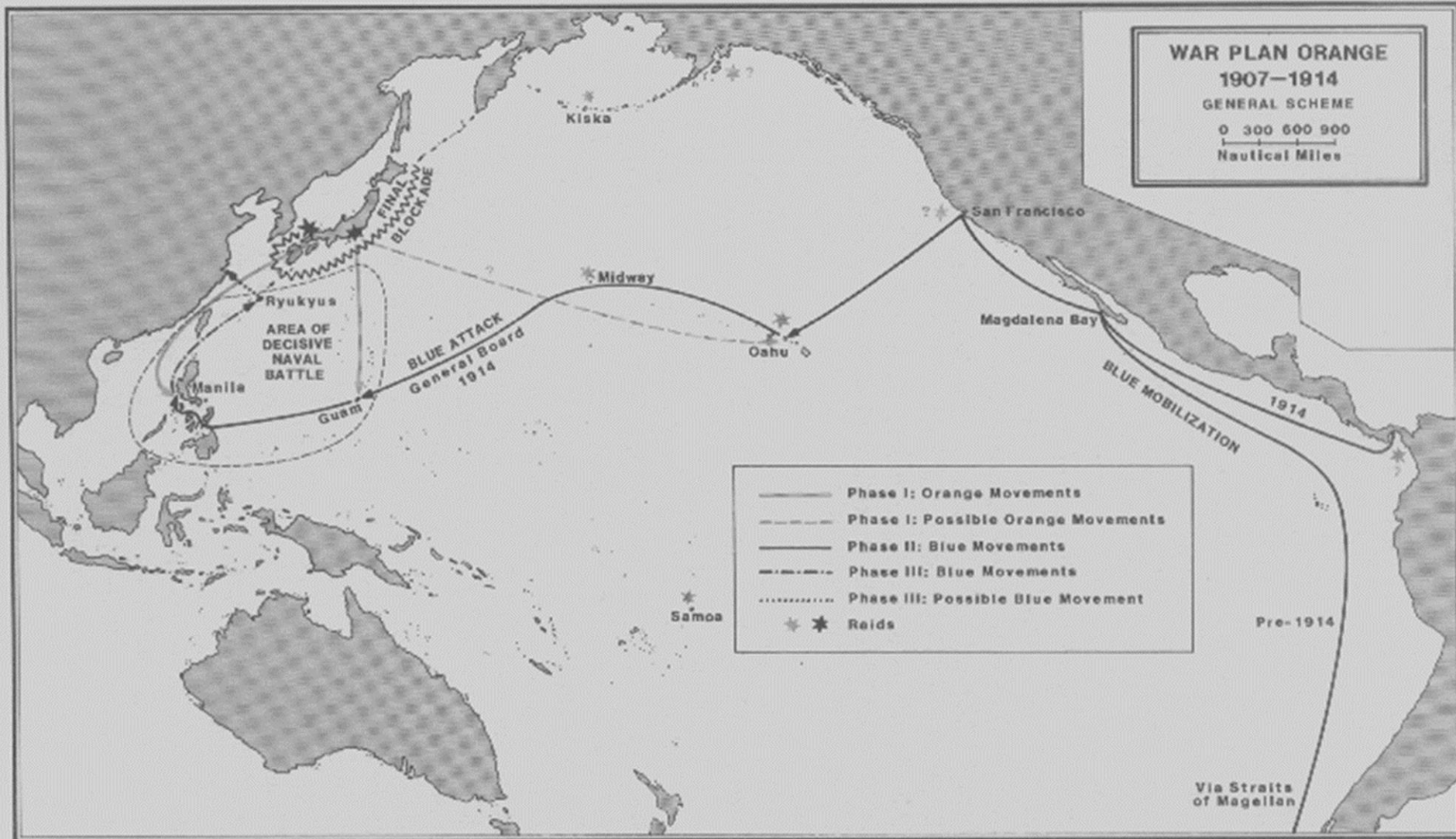


Interwar Years Amphibious Development

- ▶ War Plan “Orange.”
- ▶ USMC search for a mission.
- ▶ Oplan 712.



War Plan Orange



MAP 4.1

6 Elements of a Successful assault:

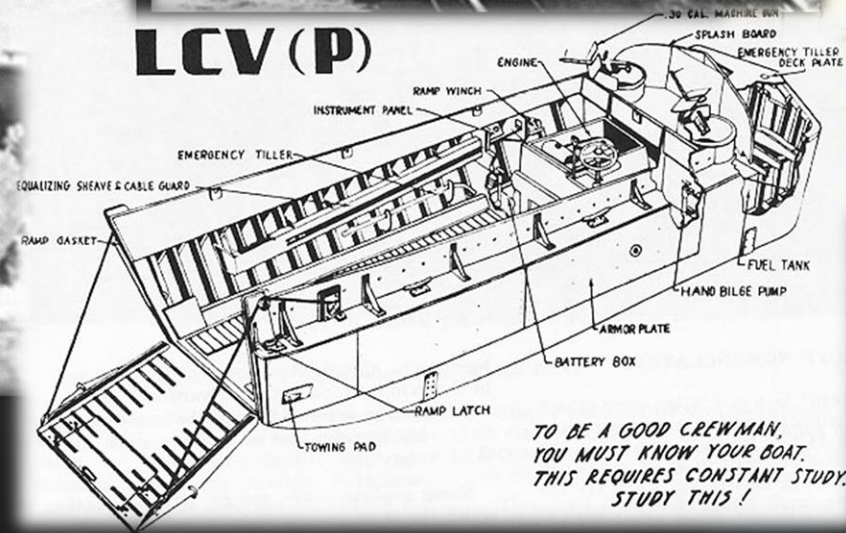
- Command relationships: Naval commander usually starts out as commander, control then passes ashore.
- Naval Gun Fire Support: only heavy artillery available, worked out problems with trajectories and ammunition.
- Aerial support: Fills a gap between naval gun support and terrain.
- Ship to shore : A tactical movement vice transportation.
- Securing beachhead: Organization, permit continuous landing of troops, equipment and supplies, maneuver space and terrain for further advance.
- Logistics and Communications: all classes of supply, combat loading, efficient and effective C2.

US Amphibious Developments during the interwar years

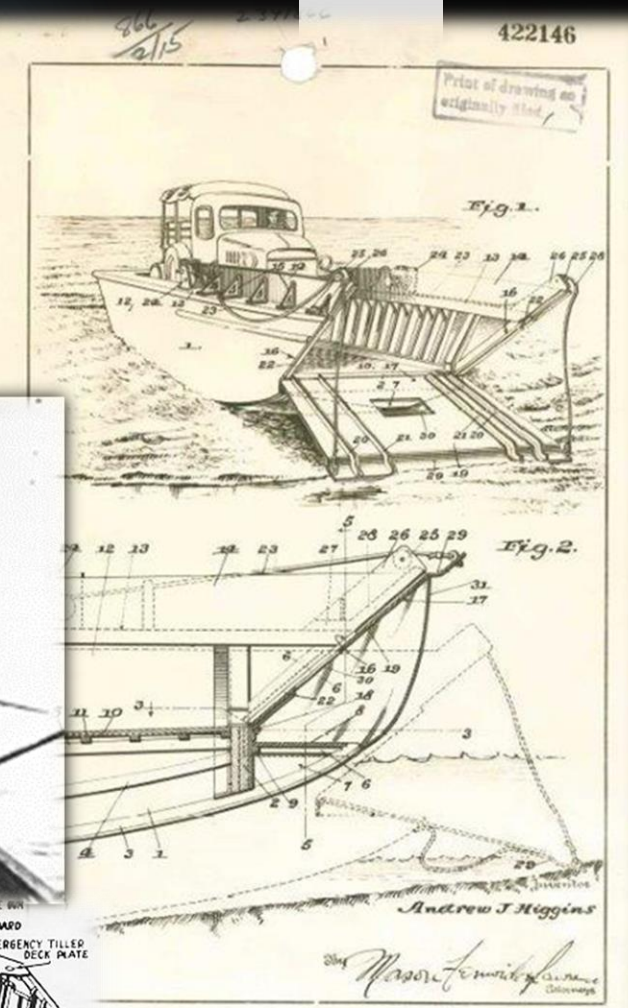
- ▶ Higgins Boat.
- ▶ Roebling Alligator.
- ▶ 1935 Tentative Landing Manual.



LCV (P)



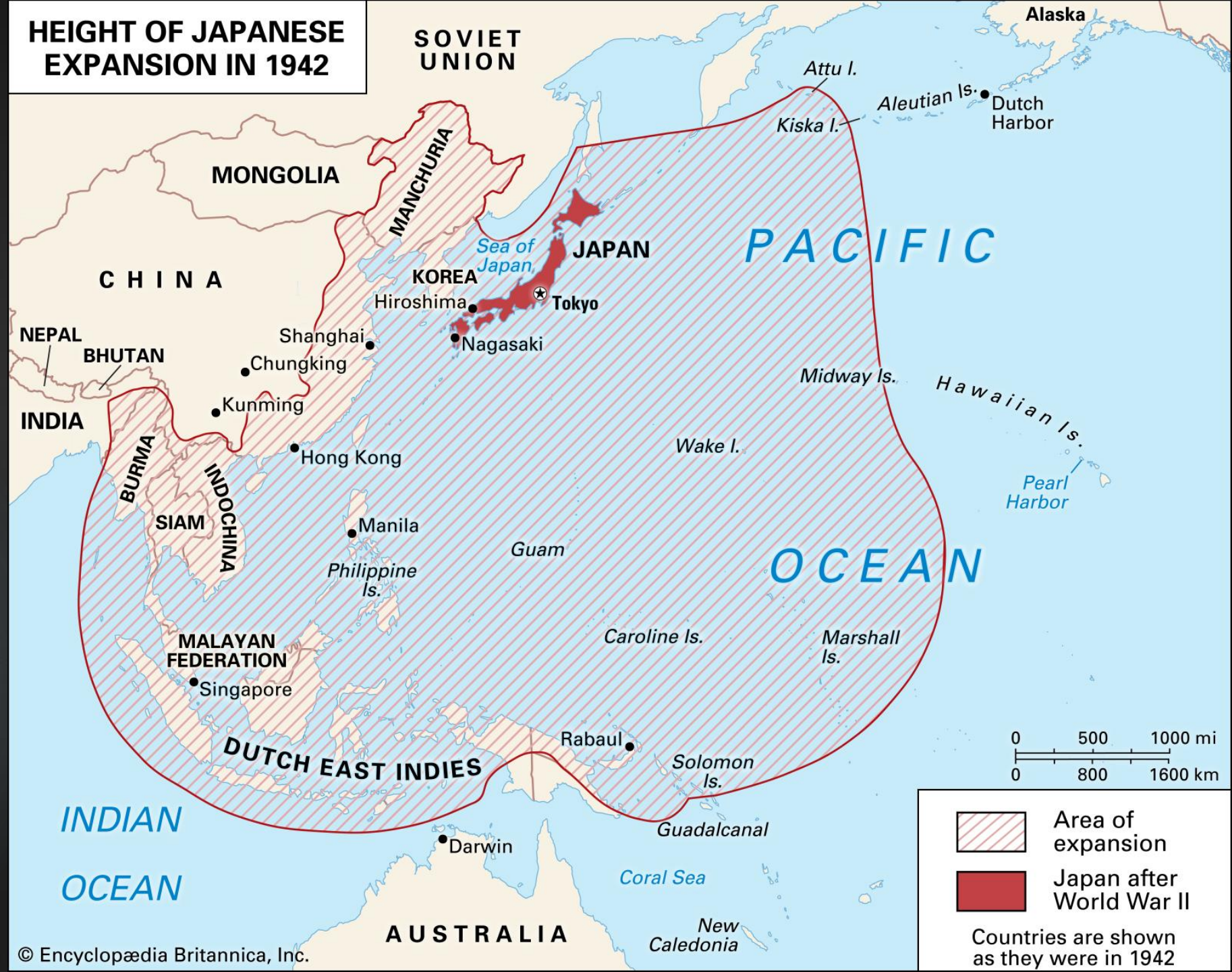
TO BE A GOOD CREWMAN,
YOU MUST KNOW YOUR BOAT.
THIS REQUIRES CONSTANT STUDY.
STUDY THIS!



Early USMC Ship to Shore Movement



The Japanese Empire 1942

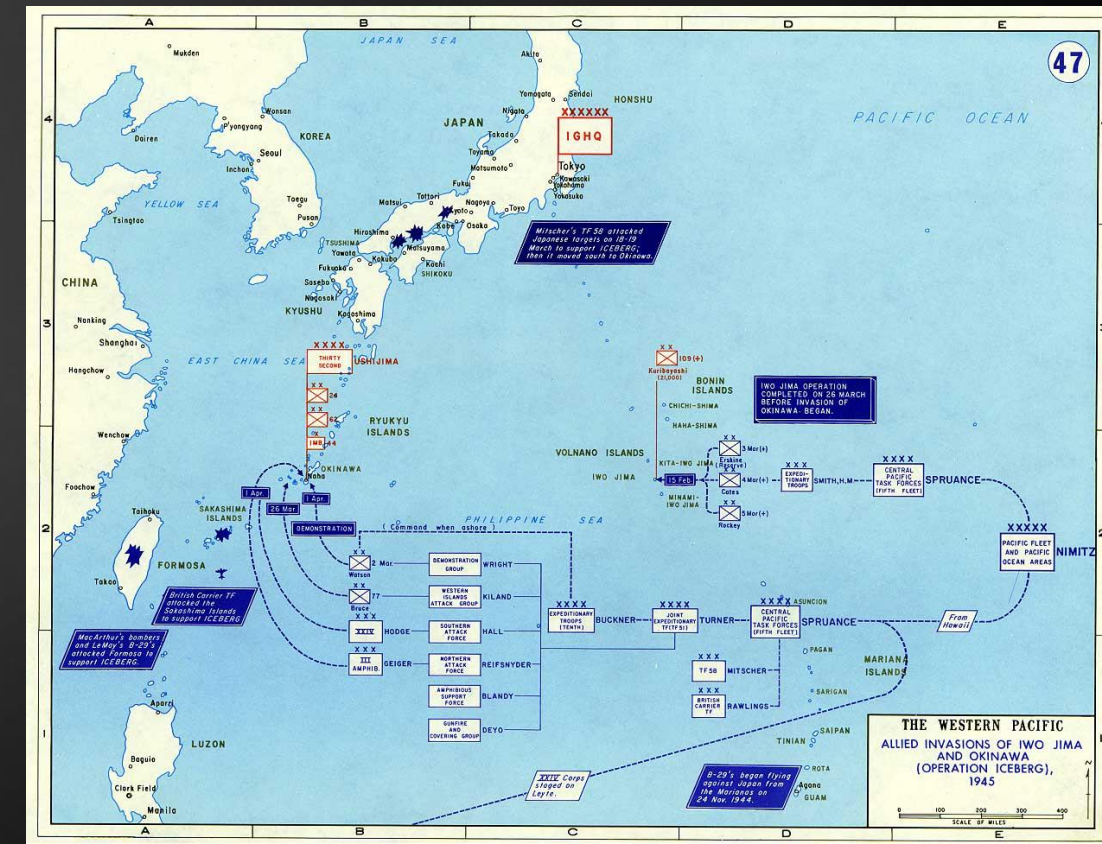


Allied Offensives in the Pacific



Why Iwo Jima (Sulphur Is.)?

- ▶ Warning radar for the Japanese home island.
- ▶ Auxiliary airfield for crippled B-29s coming home.
- ▶ Launch point for P-51 escorts.
- ▶ Secures the USN right flank of Okinawa Ops



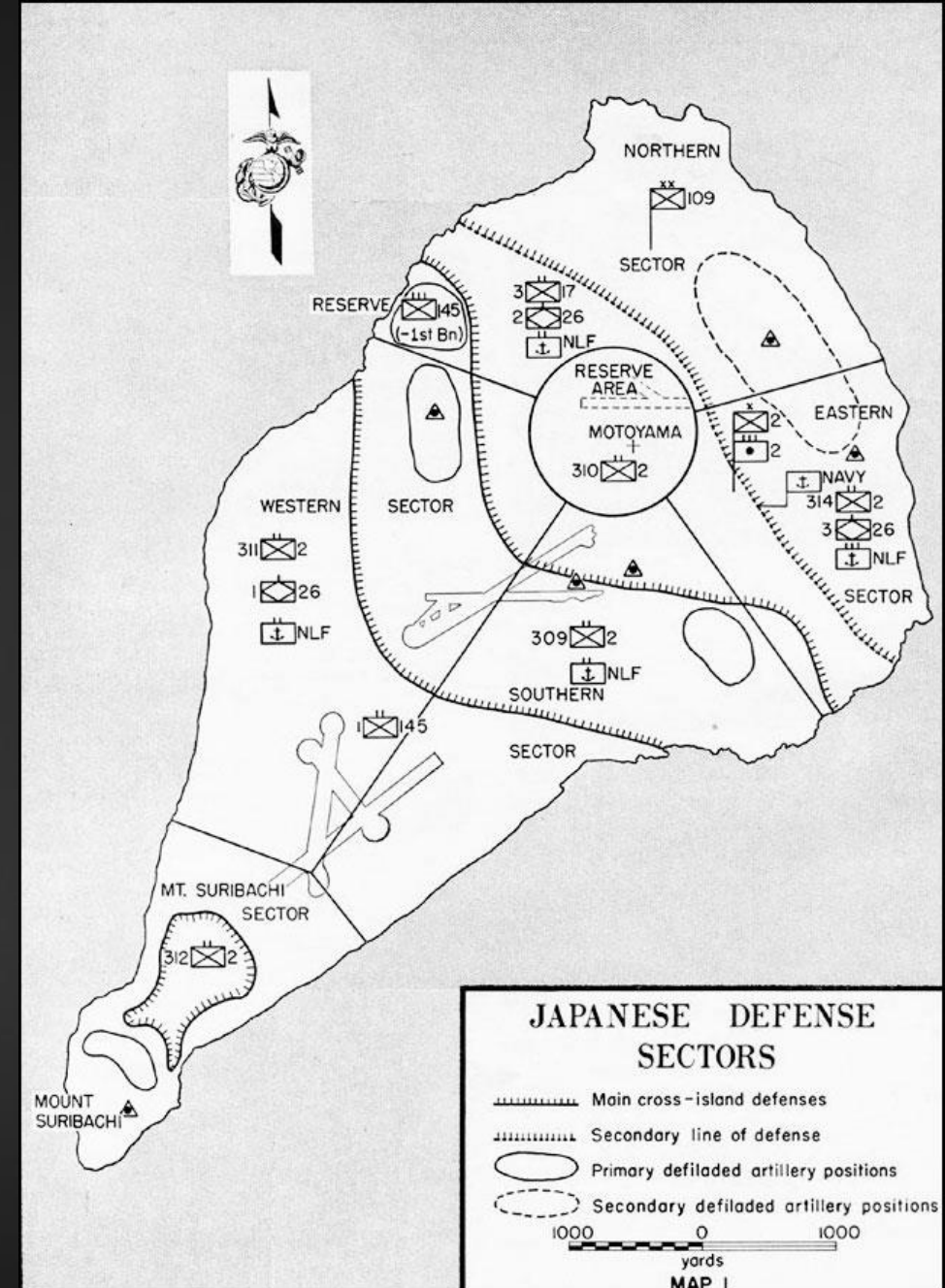
Lt General Tadamichi Kuribayashi & the 109th Division

- ▶ A 6th generation Samurai and talented defensive tactician:
 - ▶ 53 years old
 - ▶ 1914 Academy graduate, cavalry officer
 - ▶ Served in North America and China
 - ▶ Enjoyed writing poetry and riding horses
- ▶ Commanded 23,000 men:
 - ▶ 17,500 IJA
 - ▶ 5,500 IJN
- ▶ Did not believe in shore defenses nor in wasteful Banzai attacks.
- ▶ Advocate of night infiltration.
- ▶ Wrote to his wife: "...do not look for my return."



Japanese Defense

- ▶ Had food stocks for ~60-70 days.
 - ▶ No fresh vegetables
 - ▶ Potable water a constant shortage
 - ▶ Men already on ½ rations
- ▶ No fleet or air force support.
- ▶ Constructed 5,000 meters of tunnels with hundreds of defensive positions.
- ▶ Designed to make the battle “Pyrrhic Victory.”
- ▶ Interlocking fields of fire.
- ▶ Leverage natural caves and ravines.
- ▶ Defenses off of the beach line.



Japanese Honor

- ▶ [the Japanese soldier] was bound up with fighting to the death...if taken prisoner...he could not hold his head in Japan, he was disgraced, he was dead to his former life."



Tunnels and Terrain

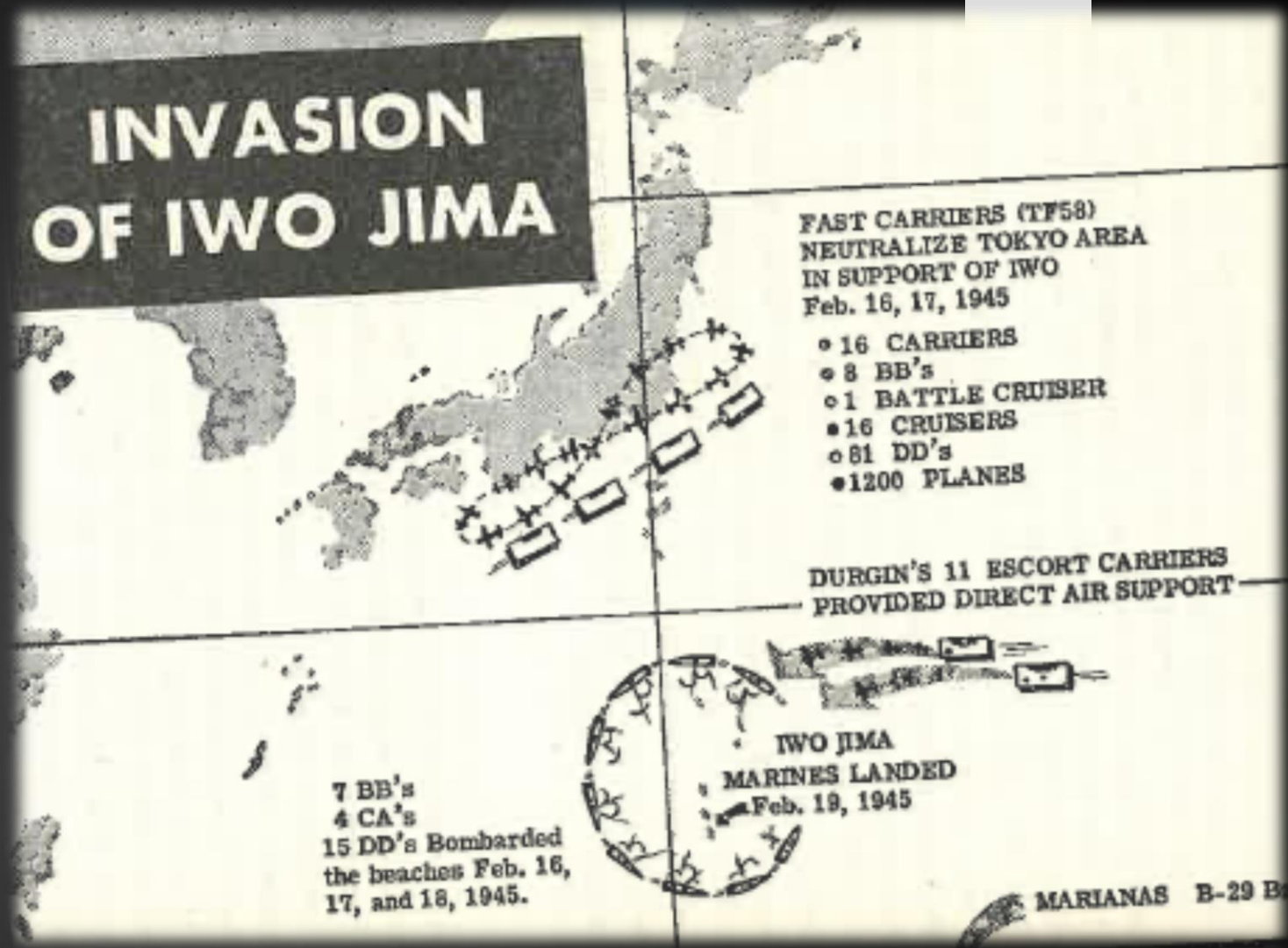


Basic Assault Plan



Shaping Efforts

- ▶ Starting 16 Feb: Navy TF 58 Cutting off mainland air and naval support.
- ▶ TF 58.3 and 58.4 provide air isolation of Iwo.



D-Day: 19 February 1945

- ▶ 1st wave crosses L/D @ 0830.
- ▶ 8 boats, each wave; 300 yds apart.
- ▶ 1st landing @ 0900 on 3,000 yd frontage.
- ▶ 2nd wave 1 minute behind.
- ▶ 3rd wave 3 minutes behind.
- ▶ Remaining waves @ 5 min intervals.









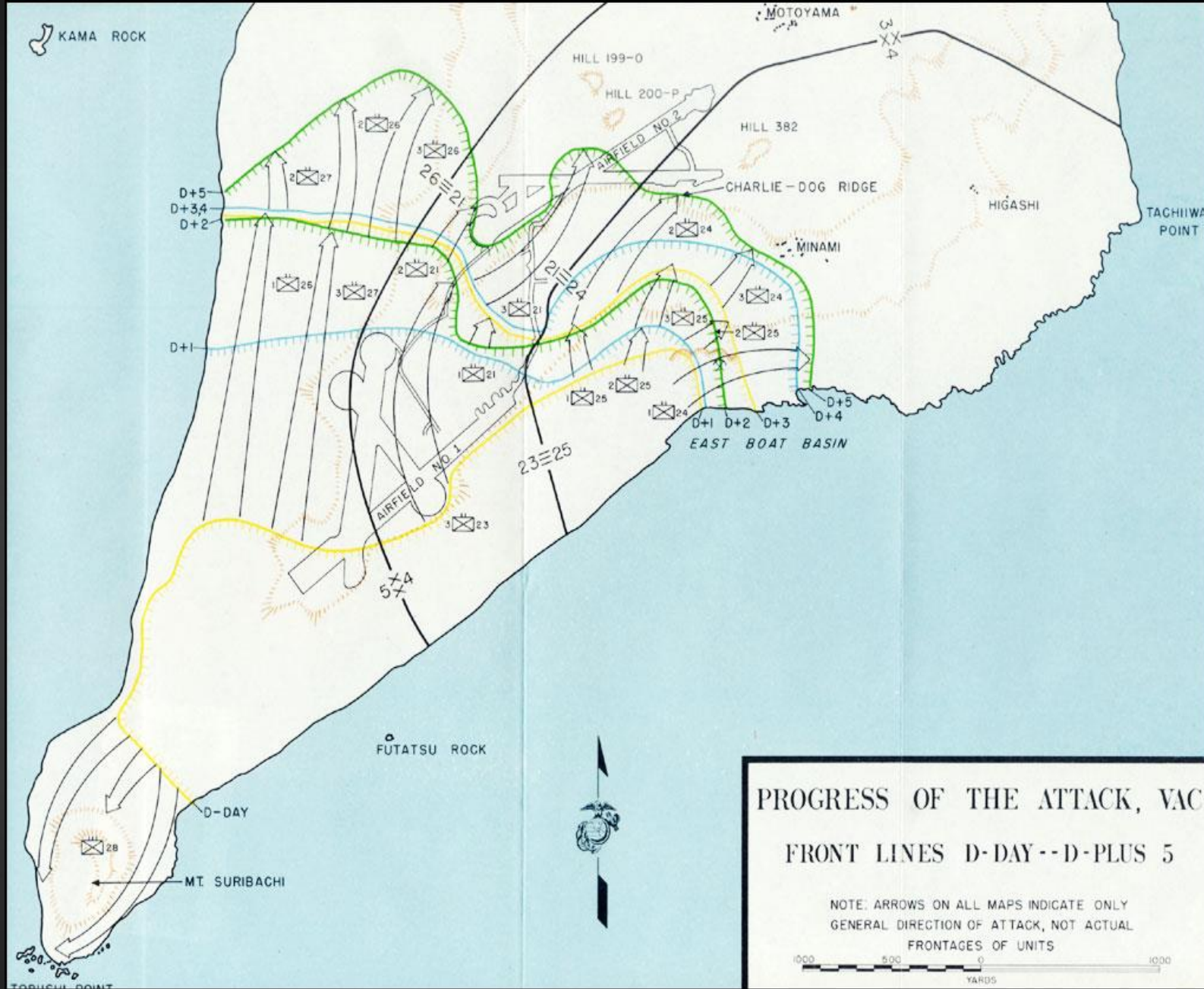
By Nightfall 19 February

- ▶ 30,000 Navy/ Marines placed ashore.
- ▶ Including armor, artillery and other supporting arms.
- ▶ NSFS and CAS coordination done with a few radios.
- ▶ Japanese use music to block US frequencies.
- ▶ Night counter attack expected.
- ▶ Troops attempted to dig in; volcanic sand problematic.
 - ▶ “the sand...it was like running in loose coffee grounds.”
 - ▶ “like digging a hole in a barrel of wheat...”



D+1 (20 Feb)

- ▶ 3,000 US casualties incurred.
- ▶ US advanced 500 - 1000 yards.
- ▶ Take Airfield #1.
- ▶ High sea states make ship to shore movement perilous.
- ▶ Subsequent days slower.
- ▶ Japanese position well fortified with ranges known and preplanned indirect fires.



D+4 (23 Feb)

- ▶ 3 Plt, E Co, 2/28 Marines, 5th Div takes summit of:
 - ▶ Suribachi / "Hot Rocks"/"Mount Plasma"
- ▶ Japanese defenses were 7 stories deep.
- ▶ Expected to hold for 10 days.
- ▶ 1031 First flag raised Sgt Ernest Thomas (KIA).
- ▶ Larger flag from LST 779 obtained.
- ▶ ~1430 second raising and photo by Rosenthal.



But always,
Charles Lindbergh
1st flag raising, Iwo Jima,
Feb. 23, 1945, 10:30 AM.



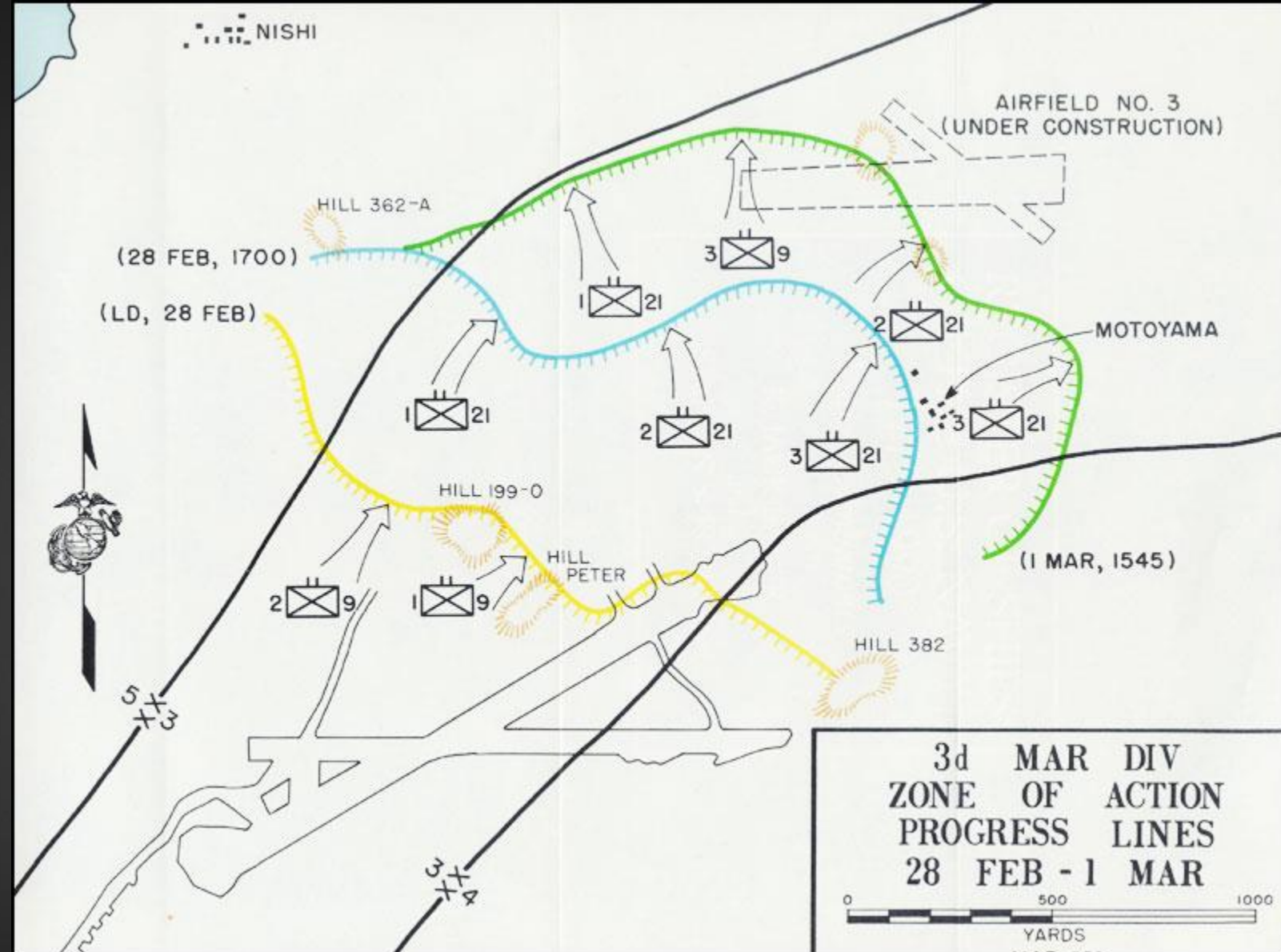


Different perspectives:

- ▶ James Forrestal: "...the flag raising on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."
- ▶ Major Y. Horie IJA: "We were very discouraged when we heard of the fall of Suribachi after only 3 days of fighting..."
- ▶ Official USMC History: "...the capture of Suribachi marked the end of a beginning; for General Kuribayashi's well entrenched main force, it was the beginning of the end."
- ▶ General Kuribayashi: "I am not afraid of the fighting power of 3 American Marine divisions if there is no bombardment from aircraft and warships. This is the only reason why we have to see such miserable situations."

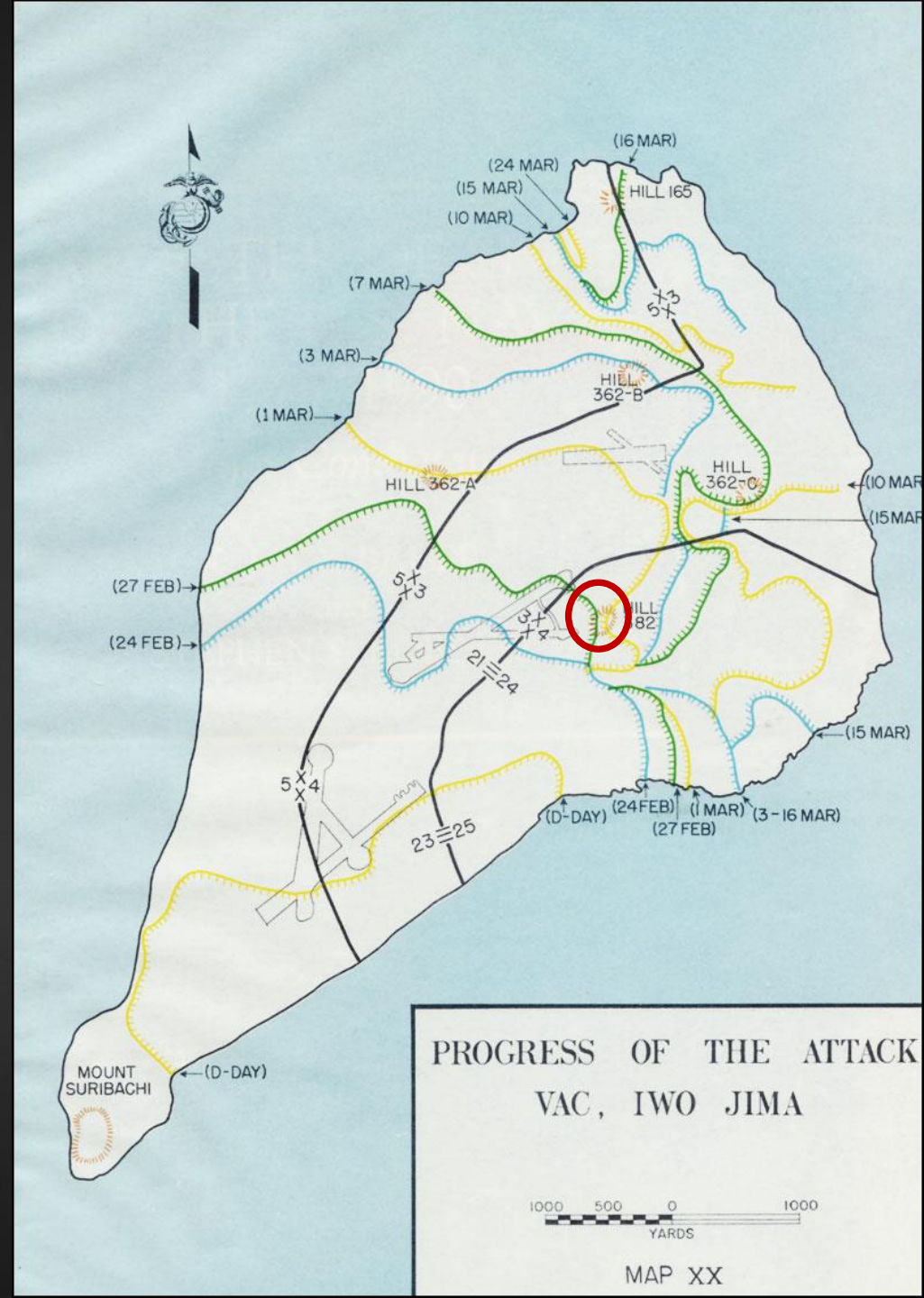
Northern Ops

- ▶ Motoyama Plateau-ravines, deep gorges, cliffs, caves, jagged edges-excellent defensive terrains.
- ▶ Infested with defensive positions, bunkers, and block houses.
- ▶ Main defensive line in the northern section of the island.
- ▶ 3rd Division reserve committed on 24 Feb.



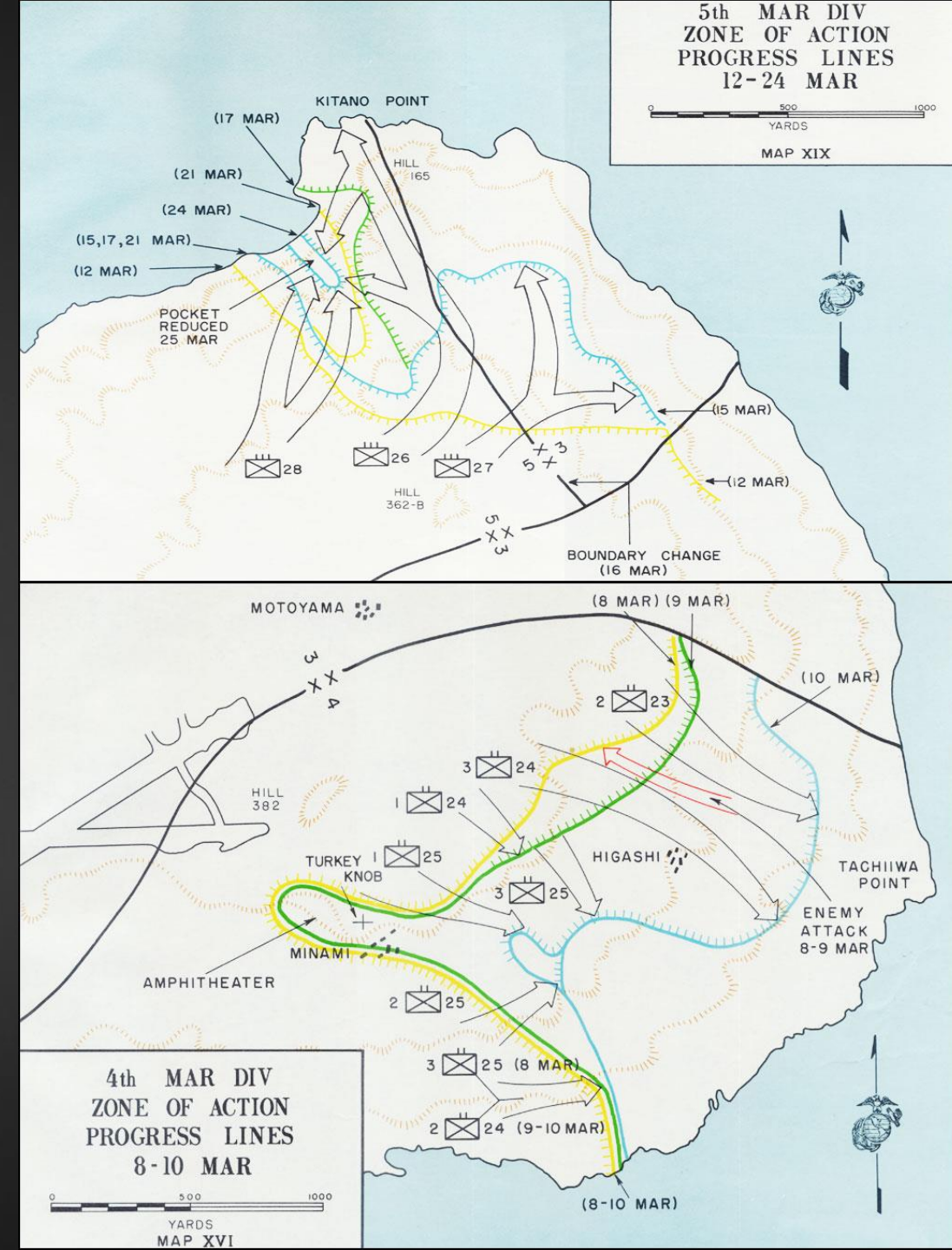
Northern Ops

- ▶ Due to the terrain, defenses, and enemy tenacity, it takes 2 more weeks to clear the northern part of the island.
- ▶ Weather issues plague resupply at beach.
- ▶ Interconnected tunnels made mop up operations and consolidation of gain difficult.
- ▶ Hill 382: "Meat Grinder."
- ▶ "...a battle of marine against Jap [sic] with the Jap having all the advantages of concealment and fields of fire from prepared positions."



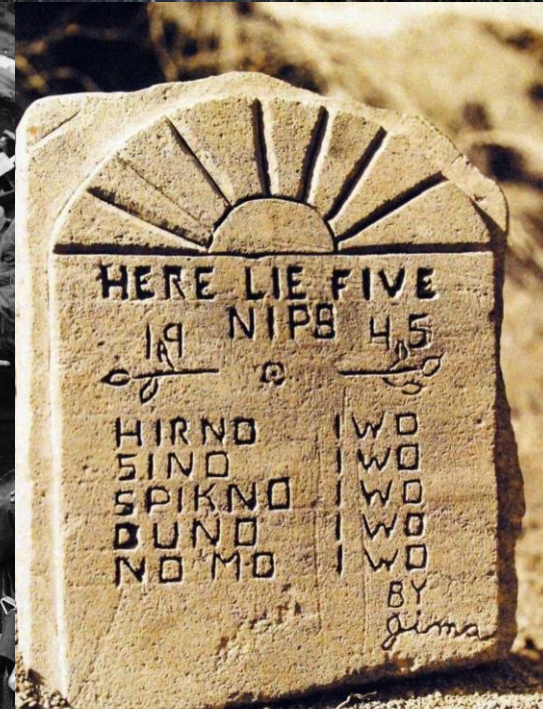
Final Operations

- ▶ March 26 the final defensive pocket taken.
- ▶ Escaped soldiers still harass American troops.
- ▶ Last Marine Bn departs April 13.
- ▶ Kuribayashi believed to commit seppuku near Kitano point.
- ▶ His body never recovered.
- ▶ Before death he offered:
 - ▶ “his most profound apologies...for being forced to yield this strategic point to enemy hands.”
 - ▶ “I will return into a spirit.”



The Math

- ▶ Japanese:
 - ▶ 13,234 counted dead
 - ▶ 8,070 estimated buried
 - ▶ 212 captured (1/4 Korean laborers)
- ▶ Americans
 - ▶ 22,082 casualties
 - ▶ 4,891 killed/missing
- ▶ Unsung Heroes
 - ▶ Navy Corpsman
- ▶ 27 MoH
 - ▶ 22 Marines
 - ▶ 5 Corpsman
 - ▶ 14 posthumously



Effects

- ▶ Concern over Japanese tenacity in defense of home island.
- ▶ Blow to Japanese morale.
- ▶ Rosenthal photo reinvigorates war bond drives. (7th drive nets \$26 billion)
- ▶ Validation of USMC amphibious practices.
- ▶ Recovery of 24,761 USAAF aircrew.
 - ▶ 2,251 B-29s land on the island.



Mt Suribachi / Iwo To Today





US MARINE LOGIC

If you don't understand this,
You've never met Marines...
Why mess with 245 years of success?