

# MOUNT SURIBACHI

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**W**ITH THE 5TH MARINE DIVISION ON IWO JIMA —Anyone who landed there will tell you that naming the stretch of beach just north of Mount Suribachi "Green Beach" was inaccurate. "Coffee-Grounds Beach" would describe the place better, for the iron-gray volcanic sand that covers the area resembles nothing so much as the dregs in a coffee pot on Monday morning. Members of the 5th Marine Division who landed here became extremely intimate with these coffee grounds during the first 48 hours of the invasion.

The sand got into their eyes and caked around their eyelashes. It became mixed in their hair like gritty dandruff. It invaded small cans of K-ration ham and eggs as soon as they were opened. It crept over the tops of the men's leggings and worked to the bottom of their shoes. The sand was both friend and enemy. It made foxhole digging easy, but it made fast movement impossible for men and vehicles.

For two days the men who landed on Green Beach were pinned to the ground. Murderous machine-gun, sniper and mortar fire came from a line of pillboxes 300 yards away in the scrubby shrubbery at the foot of the volcano. No one on the beach, whether he was a CP phone operator or a front-line rifleman, was exempt. The sight of a head raised above a foxhole was the signal to dozens of Japs, safely hidden in concrete emplacements, to open up. Men lay on their sides to drink from canteens or to urinate. An errand between foxholes became a life-and-death mission for the man who attempted it.

For two days the Marines stayed pinned to the beach in what seemed to many of them a humiliating stalemate. Hundreds of green-clad bodies hugged the coffee grounds, spread out helplessly in a scattered pattern, furnishing marksmanship practice for the Japs on the mountain with their telescopic gunsights.

The Marines had been hopelessly cut up and disorganized when they hit the beach. Their vehicles bogged down in the sand when they were brought in. Their supplies were ruined. Many of their wounded still lay where they fell, in spite of the heroic efforts of the tireless medical corpsmen. Bad weather and a choppy ocean prevented the landings of many small boats on the second day and held up the supply of new ammunition and equipment and the evacuation of the wounded. Though scores of dead marines lay everywhere, few of our troops had seen a single Jap, dead or alive.

**T**OWERING over them was Mount Suribachi, a gray, unlovely hulk with enemy pillbox chancres in its sides. The marines on Green Beach grew to hate the mountain almost as much as they hated the Japs who were on it. Reaching the summit was almost as much of a challenge as destroying the men who defended it.

The supporting air and naval fire did much. Hour after hour of surface and air bombardment couldn't fail to wipe out many emplacements, imprison many Japs in their caves and slowly eat away the mountain fortress itself. But when it came to the specific four-foot-square machine-gun emplacements and the still-smaller snipers' pillboxes, there was little the offshore and air bombardment could do except silence them for

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a few minutes. Everyone knew that in the end the foot troops would have to dig them out.

The foot troops made their drive on the third day. They were aided by a naval and air bombardment so terrific that the Tokyo radio announced that the mountain itself was erupting. They were aided also by our own artillery and rocket guns, landed with superhuman effort the previous day in spite of a choppy ocean and the enemy's guns.

But the foot troops were aided most by the tanks that advanced with them and lobbed shells into the stone and concrete revetments that blocked the way of the foot troops. The Japs were afraid of our tanks. They ducked low in their shelters and silenced their guns when they saw the tanks coming. They had planted hundreds of tank mines and had dug dozens of tank traps, but that is all they wanted to do. They didn't dare challenge our tanks with their guns.

As soon as the tanks had passed on or had been blown up by mines, the Japs came out of their holes and attacked our men from behind with machine guns and mortars. Between the foot of the volcano and Green Beach the enemy had hundreds of pillboxes and emplacements connected by a network of tunnels. When the Japs were driven from one pillbox, they would disappear until the marines advanced to another, and a moment later they would appear at their old emplacement, lobbing grenades at our men who had just passed.

**B**y early afternoon of D-plus-2 the Japs at the foot of Suribachi had been silenced. However, everyone knew there were still Japs around. There were Japs in the tunnels between the caves and there were Japs in the "spiderwebs"—the one-man sniper pillboxes—who would lift the camouflaged lids of their shelters and take pot shots at marines trying to reorganize their outfits.

There were also many Japs who were dead. There were dead Japs in every conceivable contortion of men who meet death violently. Their arms and legs were wrenched about their bodies and their fists were clenched and frozen. Those who had been killed by flame throwers were burned to a black darker than the ashes of Suribachi or scorched to a brilliant yellow. Their clothes had been burned off, and the heat had vulcanized their buttocks together with ugly black strips. It was good to see these sights after having been pinned down to Green Beach for two terrible days.

There were dead marines too. Some platoons had been entirely stripped of their officers and noncoms. Some had lost more than three-fourths of their men since morning.

**B**UT the worst of the battle for Suribachi was over. Our men had fought their way in under the guns higher up on the mountain. Many of these guns had been knocked out by our tanks and artillery, and our naval and air bombardment. Many others couldn't be depressed far enough to menace our new positions.

There was still much to be done at the foot of the volcano. There were still many emplacements to be cleaned out with flame throwers and tanks, and there were still snipers sneaking through the subterranean tunnels. The third afternoon a detachment of marines fought around one side of the mountain and another detachment fought around the other. Then they dug in for the night. At 0100 hours the Japs counterattacked. They kept coming until daybreak, but the marines held them back. And all day the Americans were busy cleaning out the tunnels, caves and concrete emplacements at the mountain's base.

On the fourth night S/Sgt. Ernest R. Thomas of Tallahassee, Fla., led a platoon whose officer had been killed; it was accompanied by the company's executive officer, 1st Lt. Harold G. Shrier of Richmond, Mo. They dug in for the night at the base of a tortuous path leading to the top

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of the mountain. It was a bad night. Rain streamed down the mountain in small rivulets that trickled under their clothes and washed the coffee grounds across their bodies. The cold wind made them shiver. They huddled in foxholes, keeping their weapons dry with their ponchos.

At 0800 hours the following morning they began the ascent. The volcanic sand on the steep path offered poor footing. Stubby plants broke off in the men's hands or pulled out by their roots. But the only resistance encountered was



**Among the first to fall after the landings on Iwo Jima were these two Marines who lie dead where they were going forward against the Japs.**

the occasional ping of a sniper's bullet. As the men reached the summit they found a few more emplacements that were manned by live Japs. These were cleaned out with flame throwers, BARs and satchel charges.

**A**t 1131 hours the Marines were in undisputed control of the top of the volcano. Sgt. Henry O. Hanson of Somerville, Mass., looked around for a pole and found a lead pipe on the ground. At 1137 hours he with Lt. Schrier and other 5th Division Marines raised the American flag on the topmost mound of Suribachi.

Far below, Green Beach was rapidly taking on the appearance of any other beachhead. The volcanic sand was littered with abandoned equipment, and the shores were lined with boats delivering more supplies and evacuating the wounded. Far to the north other Marines were fighting the battle for Motoyama Airfield No. 2.

Iwo Jima was far from being secured. But the Marines were on the summit of Mount Suribachi, the fortress that had made them wallow in coffee grounds for two days. Not far from where the flag flew, a communications man shouted, "This is easy," into his field phone.

The Marines intended to stay. The humiliation of Green Beach had been avenged.



**Knowing that some supposedly dead Japs may be playing possum, ready to pull a grenade, these Marines use a sling to remove a body from a dugout.**

(continued)



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After taking him away from the front lines where he was wounded by Jap mortar fire, four marines gently lower Cpl. W. H. Porter into a hollow in the volcanic sand.



During the fighting for Mount Suribachi two marines pour on the heat, cleaning out Jap emplacements with flame throwers and blasting a path for the advance.