

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/171001>

Copyright and reuse:

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

CORRECTING THE STORY OF IWO JIMA
Tragedy and Triumph in the Pacific War

**Covering document submitted as part of the requirement
for the degree of PhD by published work**

Robert Stanley Burrell

**Department of History
University of Warwick**

December 2021

CORRECTING THE STORY OF IWO JIMA

Tragedy and Triumph in the Pacific War

CONTENTS

Illustrations	iii
Declaration	iv
Abstract	v
1. Historiography	1
2. Establishing the Strategic Context	10
3. Examining the True Cost	13
4. Deconstructing the Justifications Given	15
5. Underscoring the Battle's Legacy	18
6. The Arguments' Reception	23
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	34
Appendices	
i. Published Works	38
ii. Background	40

Illustrations

Map of Joint Chiefs of Staff Pacific Strategy, 1944	12
Table of U.S. and Japanese Casualties from Operation Detachment	14
Photo of second flag raised atop Mount Suribachi	21

Declaration

I declare that the submitted material here, as a whole or in part, is not substantially the same as any that has been previously submitted or is currently being submitted, whether in a published or unpublished form, for a degree, diploma or similar qualification at any university or similar institution.

Robert S. Burrell

Date

Abstract

My work on the Battle of Iwo Jima, a contest which occurred between with United States and Japan between February 19 and March 26, 1945, constitutes a groundbreaking revision to previous narratives.¹ These five publications on the topic, published between 2004 and 2007, are based on extensive research conducted from 1999 through 2005 in the United States, particularly in the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force and National archives. The following paper briefly describes the historiography and established narrative of the battle from 1945 through 2003, prior to my research. It then proceeds to outline the major arguments my scholarship established concerning strategic aspects of the battle, as well as the fundamental importance of Iwo Jima's legacy to the Marine Corps. Finally, this paper highlights how my work was initially received in academic circles and then how the current historical consensus has solidified following my publications.

¹ Robert S. Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (Texas A&M University Press, 2006); Robert S. Burrell, 'Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment,' *Journal of Military History*, 68 (2004), 1143–1186; Brian Hanley and Robert S. Burrell, 'The Myth of Iwo Jima: A Rebuttal [And Response],' *The Journal of Military History*, 69 (2005), 801-809; Robert S. Burrell, 'Worth the Cost?' *Military History Quarterly*, (Winter 2007), 48-59; and Robert S. Burrell, 'Did We Have to Fight Here?,' *World War II Magazine: Special Iwo Jima Edition*, (November 2006), 60-67.

CORRECTING THE STORY OF IWO JIMA

Tragedy and Triumph in the Pacific War

1. Historiography

My initial research on the Battle of Iwo Jima began while conducting postgraduate studies at San Diego State University. Iwo Jima was the largest and most costly battle in Marine Corps history, whose legendary status exceeds all others. I began my investigation to discover why the United States had incurred so many casualties while opposing a much smaller and overmatched Japanese force. Additionally, given its remote location, small size, and lack of infrastructure, how important was Iwo Jima to U.S. strategy to justify such a price? Such doubts led me to re-examine the reasons stated by the United States for launching the invasion. As I could find no previously published critical analysis of the multiple events leading up to decision to launch this operation or its value thereafter, I began the investigation which, over several years, produced my book, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (2006). My research uncovered two divergent histories about this monumental battle – one tragic and the other triumphant. On the one hand, inter-service rivalry and service ambitions greatly influenced the decision to seize Iwo Jima, an objective which tragically resulted in far more casualties than expected. On the other hand, triumphant veneration of battle and its terrible sacrifices impacted the institution of the Marine Corps

more than previously supposed and actually served to save the organization from extinction following the war.

The historiography of Iwo Jima prior to 2003 can be broken down into three major categories: early institutional histories, journalistic accounts, and information presented on the world wide web. Since the majority of documents pertaining to the battle were initially classified or in the possession of the military Services, the earliest narratives consisted of institutional interpretations from Army, Navy and Marine Corps perspectives based on available records. Early histories included those of Raymond Henri et al. (1945), Clifford P. Morehouse (1946), Frank O. Hough (1947), Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl (1951), and William S. Bartley (1954).² All these had similar approaches in the creation of the institutional narrative, although Bartley's served as the final and most detailed official history.

Culminating in Bartley's 1954 publication, a very specific rationale for the strategy and necessity of seizing Iwo Jima had coalesced. Firstly, avoiding any dissension over the battle's necessity, these writers described the it as inevitable. Since these histories primarily focused on U.S. Navy operational aspects and U.S. Marine Corps tactical battle, none of these histories made a deeper investigation into the complex strategy which brought about the U.S. decision to seize the island. Essentially, these histories never fully questioned why the United States needed to capture this small, desolate, volcanic island over six hundred miles from Honshu (the main island of Japan) with no natural port or fresh water supply. While these histories argued

² Raymond Henri, James G. Lucas, Davide K. Dempsy, W. Keys Beech, and Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima* (New York: Dial Press, 1945); Frank O. Hough, *The Island War: The United States Marine Corps in the Pacific* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1947); Jeter Allen Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton University Press, 1951); and William S. Bartley, *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic* (Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1954).

that Iwo Jima proved important in the B-29 Superfortress bombing campaign over Japan (by providing an alternative landing field in-between Tokyo and the B-29 bases in the Marianas Islands), these histories never questioned why neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor their planners ever mentioned B-29 operations as a reason for seizing it. Likewise, they failed to provide any explanation as to why the primary reason offered for seizing Iwo Jima in plans – providing an airfield for fighter escorts to support B-29 bomber operations – utterly failed within thirty days of its capture. In total, these early histories never fully questioned the strategic value of the island in regard to the reasons provided for seizing it, nor its subsequent value to the war effort following its seizure.

By 1954, histories utilized one overarching and singular rationale to justify the losses on Iwo Jima, which my later work labels as “the emergency landing theory.” This theory validates the twenty-eight thousand U.S. casualties and 6,821 deaths on the basis that seizure of the airfields on Iwo Jima saved an equal number of B-29 Superfortress crewmen. Specifically, the theory argues “by the end of the war a total of 2,251 Superforts carrying 24,761 airmen landed on the island. A large number of these would have been lost if Iwo had not been available.”³ Importantly, this theory in institutional narratives caveated that a significant portion or even a majority of the 2,251 B-29s would have been lost without Iwo Jima, but later journalistic narratives would infer that all B-29 landings were emergencies and that the island saved 24,761 airmen.⁴

³ Bartley, p. 210.

⁴ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, pp. 106-107.

There are a number of explanations as to why initial histories offered little investigation into the strategic necessity of the battle. First, each of the three (and later four) U.S. military services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines) produced their own histories based on available records particular to that service. In the case of Iwo Jima, historians used Marine Corps records nearly exclusively. However, the Marine Corps had no membership on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and had no input into the decision-making process of Pacific conquests. Reviewing Marine Corps records would only illuminate the reasons provided for seizing Iwo Jima when the orders were issued but no insight into how that decision was made. Additionally, after the war, planning documents and battle reports for each service went to geographically separate historical archives. This made gaining more a complete understanding of how the battle fit within the totality of primary documents a challenge, only overcome by extended travel. Moreover, the Joint Chiefs of Staff planned and approved every Pacific operation, not the services, and these documents remained classified during the period in which initial histories were published. Declassification of these documents began generally fifty years after the war (each document verified and released as deemed appropriate), at which point the Iwo Jima narrative had already solidified.⁵ In summation, earlier histories began their narratives with some strategic context, composed with little academic rigor, and then proceeded to operational and tactical exploits.

Most historians failed to question the emergency landing theory after the 1950s. Bartley's official history of the battle, published in 1951, served as the authoritative narrative

⁵ Generally, the U.S. government began declassification of World War II documents about fifty years after the war. Not all documents were declassified at the same time. The records used in my book derived from National Archives Record Group 218 and found at the libraries of San Diego State University and the U.S. Naval Academy.

for the historians which followed, and in so far as operation and tactical aspects of the battle, still serves in that capacity. Official Volumes that followed in Bartley's footsteps included *Western Pacific Operations* (1971) perpetuating the emergency landing theory and adding even more aircraft, stating "by the time the war came to an end, about 2,400 of the giant bombers had made emergency landings on Iwo runways, involving a total of 25,000 airmen."⁶ However, one most notable historian, Ronald Spector, took a parting shot at the emergency landing theory in his history *Eagle Against the Sun* (1985). Spector states that "by the end of the war the bombers had made about 2,400 emergency landings on Iwo Jima, leading some writers to claim that taking into account the eleven-man crews, the island airstrips saved about 20,000 airmen. Of course such a figure assumes that none of the bombers in distress would have reached the Marinas and that if forced down at sea, the crews would have been rescued – an obvious exaggeration."⁷ Another well-known Marine historian, Jon Hoffman, questioned the wisdom of the heavy price incurred at Iwo Jima in an article published in the *Marine Corps Gazette* (1995), stating "if the weapons only allow us to achieve costly successes like those on Iwo Jima or Tarawa, then perhaps the Marine Corps will not really have won at all."⁸ Unfortunately, these scholars only questioned the battle sparingly, missing the deep falsehoods of the emergency landing theory and the extent contentious nature of the Iwo Jima decision.

Numerous writers have written books about the battle, its veterans, and participating units over the past seventy-five years. Journalistic accounts of the battle left the early military

⁶ George W. Garand and Truman R. Strobridge, *Western Pacific Operations* (Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1971), p. 601.

⁷ Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (Free Press, 1985), p. 502.

⁸ Jon T. Hoffman, 'The Legacy and Lessons of Iwo Jima,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, 79 (1995), p. 72.

analysis of the institutional narratives completely unchallenged. Instead, Iwo Jima made an excellent foundation for story-telling. One of the most memorable features of the battle included a photo of an American flag raised over the island's highest point on the fourth day after the invasion, 23 February 1945. The photo quickly became very popular in both America and Europe. This iconic and powerful image of the flag-raising on Mount Suribachi drew the attention of many popular readers to Iwo Jima – looking to discover the full story behind that photo. In a similar effort, journalists' accounts wove the horrific carnage and self-sacrifice endured by Marines into the narrative to emphasize the patriotic idealism illustrated by the flag-raising event.

Three best-selling books over the decades provide an example of the evolving public narrative: those of Richard F. Newcomb in 1965, Bill D. Ross in 1985, and James Bradley in 2000.⁹ These stories focused on hero-worship, particularly describing the combat actions of certain champions, both those in the popular photo as well as those less famous – like the 27 medal of honor recipients in the conflict (the most medals of honor awarded to any particular battle). Newcomb's book, simply titled *Iwo Jima* (1965), described the battle being fought from the view of the Americans prosecuting it. Its catchy banter between veterans, from high-ranking officers to junior enlisted men, draws the reader into the narrative. In the end, Newcomb justifies the battle based on the emergency landing theory, stating that despite the 6,821 American dead, the island's airfield saved more than those lost in the form of B-29 crewmen.

⁹ Richard F. Newcomb, *Iwo Jima* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965); Bill D. Ross, *Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), and James Bradley, *Flags of Our Fathers* (Bantam Books, 2000).

Written at the peak of the Cold War, Bill Ross's book, *Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor* (1985), used the battle to exemplify American patriotism. He characterized the invasion as "a landmark of mass courage and individual valor...the likes of which mankind most probably will not witness again."¹⁰ Such tales had little consideration for critical analysis, and as such, the strategic context of the battle and the reasons for its necessity became equally legendary. In these narratives, the emergency landing theory matured to its fullest extent of inaccuracy. Ross argued that "Iwo Jima in American hands meant that 24,751 Army Air Corps crewmen would be saved from ditching dabbled aircraft in the icy waters of the north Pacific with an almost certain loss of most of them."¹¹

Another very popular book from 2000, James Bradley's *Flags of Our Fathers*, focuses on the story of five Marines and one Navy corpsman leading up to the flag-raising on top of Mount Surabachi. Like Newcomb and Ross, Bradley uses the battle as the backdrop for relating stories of the greatest generation to later generations. One of James Bradley's protagonists included his father – John Bradley.¹² This book also relates the story from the view of its participants,

¹⁰ Ross, p. xiii.

¹¹ Ross, p. 16. Written twenty years earlier than that of Ross, Richard Newcomb's book did not exaggerate the emergency landing theory to its fullest extent as Ross would later do. However, Newcomb did argue that the number of lives saved by B-29 landings exceeded battle casualties. See Newcomb, p. 244.

¹² Focused on the six flag-raisers, *Flags of Our Fathers* actually got two of the participants in the event incorrect. The U.S. Marine Corps conducted a thorough investigation into the flag-raisers in 2016. The Huly Panel consisted of Lieutenant General Jan C. Huly (retired), Brigadier General Jason Bohm, Sergeant Major Justin D. Lehew, Colonel Keil R. Gentry, Sergeant Major David L. Maddux, Dr. Breanne Robertson, Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer, Colonel Mary H. Reinwald (retired), Sergeant Major Richard A. Hawkins (retired), and Dr. Randy Papadopoulos. This panel, founded by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, concluded that John Bradley was not a flagraiser in the photo, but Bradley had probably participated in the first flagraising. Again, in 2019 the Marine Corps launched the Bower Board (led by Brigadier General William J. Bowers) which worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to examine photographic evidence. It determined that Harold Keller, and not Rene Gagnon, was in the photo. See Mary H. Reinwald, 'Correcting the Record: The Huly Panel Looks at the Iwo Jima Flag Raisings,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), pp. 195-217. Also see Keil R. Gentry, "'In Fairness to All Parties": The Marine Corps Corrects the Historical Record,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019),

making them real and personable. In the final tally, Bradley also justified the battle's horrific losses on the emergency landing theory, stating, "the American victory unquestionably hastened the end of the war. In the ensuing months, about 2,400 distressed B-29 bombers, carrying 27,000 crewmen would make emergency, lifesaving landings on the island."¹³

The historical and journalistic depictions of the Iwo Jima battle over several decades created a public perception of it as both inevitable and justified by emergency B-29 Superfortress landings – a narrative transcribed directly onto the world wide web. The battle's *Wikipedia* page in 2003 illustrates one such example: "eventually the Allies would have to take Iwo Jima," and "the Allies, led by the United States of America, wanted Iwo Jima not only to neutralize threats to its bombers and shipping, but to use its airfields for fighter escort and emergency bomber landings."¹⁴ Other websites simply used the emergency landing theory directly as the foremost example of how and why the battle took place.¹⁵ Over time, the Americans who lost their lives on Iwo Jima were transformed into patriotic martyrs who stoically carried out the unquestionably necessary task of saving B-29s. This description of an unavoidable battle, justified by the lives of B-29 crewmen who were subsequently saved by the island's airfields in emergency landings, had formed and remained unchanged in histories, books and public space for decades.

pp. 218-250. For how these changes to history were viewed by the press, see Mary Bowerman, 'Marines Investigate Iconic Iwo Jima Photo,' *USA Today*, (4 May 2016).

¹³ Bradley, p. 247.

¹⁴ 'Battle of Iwo Jima,' *Wikipedia*, (31 August 2003), <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Battle_of_Iwo_Jima&oldid=1541627>, [Accessed 6 January 2021].

¹⁵ One such example was published in 2010, but it exemplifies those which proceeded it. See Timothy Lundberg, 'Remembering Iwo Jima and Its Importance to Strategic Air Power,' Andersen Air Force Base website, (3 Mar. 2010) <<https://www.andersen.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/415598/remembering-iwo-jima-and-its-importance-to-strategic-airpower>>, [Accessed on 21 February 2021].

My questions regarding the emergency landing theory led me to undertake a thorough investigation into how the decision for Iwo Jima was made (and at what actual cost), but also into its subsequent value – not only during the Pacific War but in its legacy. Following the war, the battle evolved into historically gargantuan proportions as the premier example of amphibious assault (no doubt related to the large number of casualties and sacrifices). Simultaneously, Iwo Jima scholarship thrived in two quite distinct spaces: (1) the historical narrative, and (2) a parallel but barely intersecting discussion on the battle’s iconography. How the battle’s symbology powerfully impacted United States culture (as viewed through art, sculpture, and film) was completed by Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall in *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (1994).¹⁶ Their book brings excellent analysis on how Iwo Jima iconography initially formed, and in what way it progressed over the following decades. Further study, however, needed to blend both the history of the battle as well as the subsequent impact of its legacy in order to evaluate how Iwo Jima’s reality and mythology intertwined to impact the institution of the Marine Corps, the U.S. Government, and the American public. The second portion of my research focuses primarily on the post-war period dubbed “the unification crisis” – a period from 1945 to 1951 when the Services fought for post-war missions and resources. I describe how society’s collective memory of Iwo Jima saved the Marine Corps from extinction during this contentious period. In addition to excellent secondary sources (like Marling and Wetenhall’s), my argument leans on primary sources from the times, including periodicals and Congressional testimony.

¹⁶ Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Harvard University Press, 1994).

2. Establishing the Strategic Context

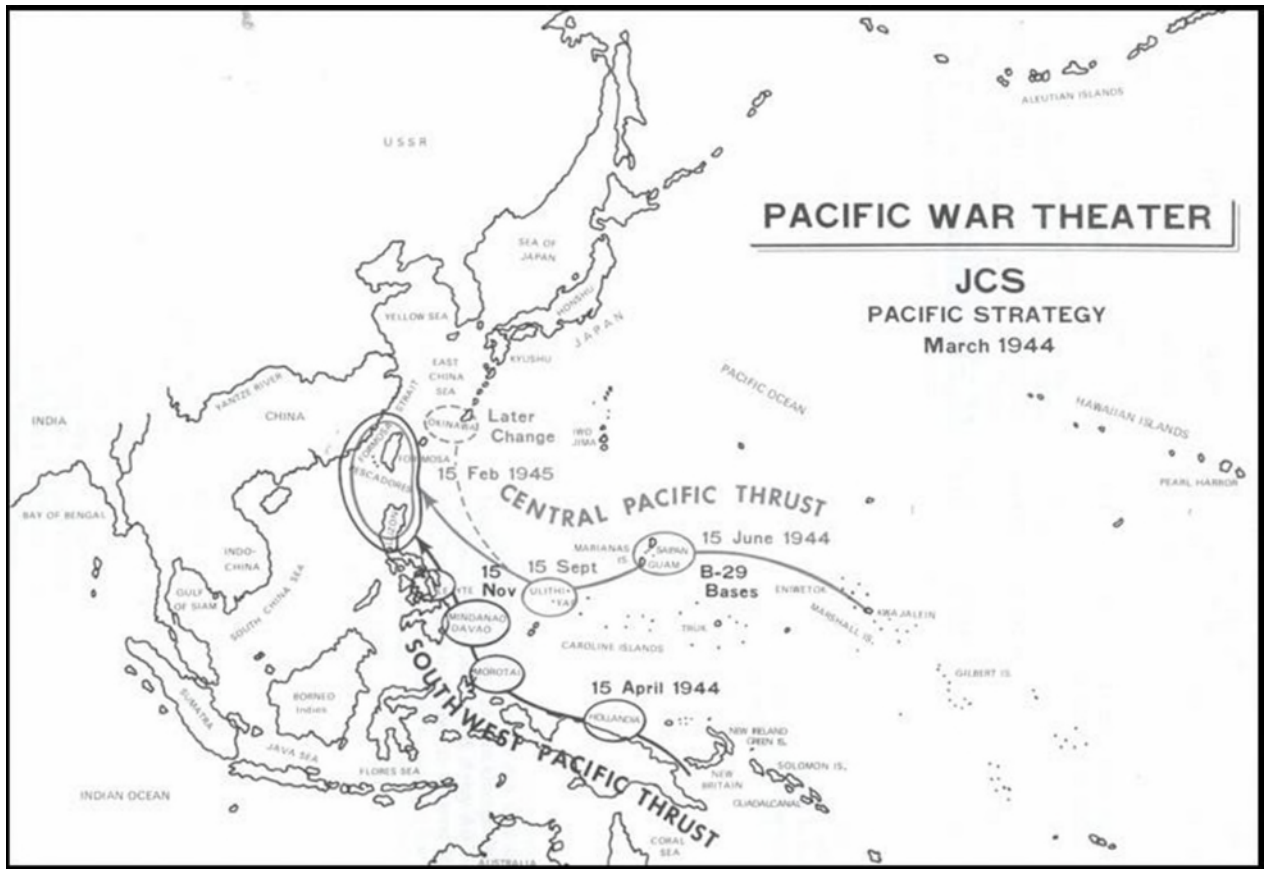
One of the methodologies used in my research consisted of an extensive review of all available information on Iwo Jima derived from a multitude of primary sources. This included U.S. Army records in the National Archives in Maryland, but also Army records at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania. Army Air Force records and generally transferred to Air Force historical centers. Consequently, I visited the Air Force Historical Research Agency in Alabama, as well as the Curtis LeMay Library in California. Both Navy and Marine Corps records, at the time, were available at the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. at the Marine Corps History and Museums Division and the Naval Historical Center.¹⁷ I also visited Marine Corps University Library in Virginia and considered available Navy and Marine Corps records at the repository of U.S. Naval Academy as well. Japanese sources were more difficult, some consisting of translated secondary sources, but others as primary sources written or translated into English. This holistic viewpoint, supported by declassified Joint Chiefs of Staff documents, provided the foundation for the narrative.

My comprehensive, multi-archival research into why and how Iwo Jima became a U.S. strategic objective demonstrates that, far from inevitable, the decision to seize Iwo Jima deviated from three years of previous strategy. Preceding histories had overlooked this strategic context in order to focus primarily on the tactical aspects of the battle. In fact, an invasion of Iwo Jima had been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as early as 1943, whose planners had ominously determined that its seizure would be costly and out of all proportion to

¹⁷ Marine Corps records have since moved to the library in Quantico, Virginia. Additionally, the Naval Historical Center has since been renamed the Naval History and Heritage Command.

its usefulness in the war effort – thus shelving such ideas. Instead, the Iwo Jima decision derived from a late change in strategy in 1944, heavily influenced by the rivalry between the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army in competing drives towards Japan. And, the decision equally resulted from the ambitions of the emergingly independent U.S. Army Air Forces, who desperately sought a solution for the poor performance of the costly B-29 Superfortress as it began operations from the Mariana Islands in the second half of 1944.

From 1942 onward, the Army and Navy could not come to agreement over which service would lead the advance across the Pacific to defeat Japan. Consequently, the U.S. divided its strategy and resources between the U.S. Navy's Central Pacific advance and the U.S. Army's Southwest Pacific campaign. At some point, these advances would have to merge. As illustrated in the following map, early in the war both Services planned to combine forces during the invasion of Formosa (modern-day Taiwan). However, as these trajectories neared their culminations in 1944, the Commanders-in-Chief of Army and Navy engaged in vicious arguments over who would command the Formosa invasion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consisted of two Navy admirals and two Army generals (one of whom was an Army Air Force general; the other being the President's advisor), who decided on strategy essentially on an informal majority rules decision-making process with the President as arbitrator when required.



*Joint Chiefs of Staff Pacific Strategy, 1944*¹⁸

In the summer of 1944, in an attempt to break the deadlock over the Formosa decision, the Navy proposed seizing Okinawa instead (with overall Navy leadership, of course). Additionally, the Navy proposed adding Iwo Jima as a derivative objective, specifically to garner support from the Army Air Forces' member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Henry Arnold) for this contentious change in advance from Formosa to Okinawa. Fortuitously, the Army Air Forces had recently been suggesting Iwo Jima might improve B-29 operations. Changing the location where the Army and Navy's advances merged from Formosa to Okinawa greatly served the ambitions of America's top admiral Ernest J. King. However, adding the subsidiary objective of Iwo Jima ensured King's support from the Army Air Forces who desperately desired to improve

¹⁸ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, p. 22.

B-29 operations and thus fulfill their longstanding ambitions of demonstrating the dominance of strategic air power. In summation, this alternative to the Formosa invasion ensured the support from three of the four members in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and broke the deadlock over strategy in 1944. It was through this late decision process in late 1944 that the Iwo Jima decision was finalized. Consequently, the Iwo Jima decision was far from the “inevitable” as one portrayed in official histories, but, instead – one made quickly, which bypassed years of planning, and aided the Service interests of decision makers.

3. Examining the True Cost

Perhaps nowhere in history of modern warfare can one find a more horrific battle than that prosecuted on the small island of Iwo Jima. The price of victory shocked the American public, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President. The numbers of U.S. casualties resulted in one of the costliest conflicts in World War II and the most expensive for the Marine Corps in nearly two hundred and fifty years of history. The official history published in 1954 provided comprehensive records of U.S. losses, ones that had been adjusted and updated for nine years. Since 1954, U.S. casualties have remained unchallenged. However, historians previously overestimated the number of Japanese casualties, which the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps never fully questioned subsequent to the battle – a particularly problematic calculation likely reinforced by the fact that the ratio of U.S. to Japanese casualties on Iwo Jima remained the highest of the war.

One of the primary reasons for the inaccurate assessment of Japanese casualties stems from the date that the U.S. Navy determined the battle ended. Official Marine Corps histories end the battle after 36 days of fighting on 26 March 1945 – at which point histories essentially

claim all the Japanese on Iwo Jima had been killed or captured. Conversely, once the Marines departed and an Army garrison arrived, a significant number of Japanese remained and continued to resist until the end of the war in August. In fact, the Army garrison killed another 1,602 Japanese and captured 867 more. Subtracting these numbers from those used in previous narratives, actual Japanese casualties during the battle period range from 18,061 and 18,591.

Organization	Killed in Action & Missing in Action	Wounded in Action	Combat Fatigue	Taken Prisoner	Total
U.S. Marines	5,931	17,272	2,648	0	25,851
U.S. Navy	890	1,945	0	0	2,835
U.S. Army	9	28	0	0	37
Total	6,821	19,217	2,648		28,686
Japanese	(estimated)				(estimated)
Defence Force	17,845 - 18,375			216	18,061 - 18,591
Ratio of American / Japanese casualties -					1 : .64

*U.S. and Japanese Casualties from Operation Detachment (19 Feb – 26 March 1945)*¹⁹

What makes the number of battle casualties so strikingly alarming is that the ratio of U.S. to enemy losses was 3 Americans to every 2 Japanese, in a contest where the United States held all the technological and strategic advantages. This ratio was by far the worst of any U.S. major land operation in World War II. Even the inaccurate ratios presented by the Joints Chiefs of Staff to the President made him pause. This tragic example of Japanese determination and sacrifice reinforced the logic that the U.S. total victory goals would require the use of atomic bombs – as the cost with conventional means remained too high for the American public to condone. My work contests the arguments of some important historical contributions, like that

¹⁹ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, p. 83.

of John Dower's *War Without Mercy*.²⁰ While racial hatred did prove a vital component of how Japan and the United States prosecuted the Pacific War, it was the alarm over casualties, like those suffered on Iwo Jima, which primarily drove the decision to use the atom bomb.²¹

4. Deconstructing the Justifications Given

In an attempt to fairly evaluate reasons provided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Army Air Forces for invading Iwo Jima, my research evaluates them all. The plan approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided five reasons: (1) seizing the island's airfield to use for fighter escort missions; (2) denying the airfields for enemy operations; (3) using the island to establish air defense for the Mariana Islands; (4) providing a staging base for bombers; and (5) precipitating a decisive naval engagement with the Imperial Fleet.²² There were five other reasons provided after the battle by the Navy, Army Air Forces, or their senior leaders (after the battle): (1) depriving the enemy of an early warning system; (2) improving the morale of B-29 pilots; (3) providing a base for air-sea rescue operations; (4) halting the threat of Japanese planes to B-29s; and (5) to use as an emergency landing field for B-29s. My research examines all ten rationalizations. However, two remain the most relevant for discussion, and both derived from the use of Iwo Jima's airfields by the Army Air Forces – fighter escort for B-29s and the B-29 emergency landings.²³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided one primary and overarching reason for initiating the invasion of Iwo Jima – to seize the island's airfields in order to establish a U.S. Army Air Force

²⁰ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

²¹ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, pp. 120-122.

²² I have summarized these for clarity. See Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, pp. 95-96.

²³ I have also summarized these. See Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, pp. 92-122.

fighter base. The Army Air Force desired fighter escort for its B-29 bombers operating out of Tinian and Saipan. On the face of it, this plan made perfect sense. Fighter escort of bombers in Europe had proved crucial in improving bomber operations against Germany. However, the situation in the Pacific in 1944 and 1945 was drastically different than that faced in Europe. Firstly, Iwo Jima was located too many miles from Honshu to effectively support fighter operations. Secondly, the speed, altitude, navigational systems, and pressurized cockpit of the B-29 vastly surpassed those of the P-51 Mustang fighter. Essentially, America's technological wonder of the B-29 was generations apart from its newest fighter. These technological differences made P-51 Mustang fighter escort of the B-29 Superfortress bomber from Iwo Jima essentially incompatible. Consequently, following the invasion, the Army Air Force only completed three escort missions from Iwo Jima in April 1945 before terminating these activities altogether. Catastrophically, the foremost reason provided for seizing Iwo Jima never materialized. One chapter in my book is dedicated to the preinvasion reasons provided for the use on Iwo Jima's airfields, but this topic also highlighted in my three articles on the battle in the *Journal of Military History*, *World War II Magazine*, and *Military History Quarterly*.

The most utilized justification (provided initially by the Army Air Force, introduced into U.S. military histories, and later echoed in public accounts) for invading Iwo Jima developed after the Marines had already invaded. Essentially, this was a justification in hindsight. This rationale centered on the island providing an emergency landing strip for B-29s returning to the Marianas following bombing operations over Honshu. This reasoning evolved into what my work dubs as "the emergency landing theory." The theory initially implied that some untold

portion of 2,251 B-29s landing on Iwo Jima did so for emergencies. Later sources exaggerated this argument to state that most of the landings consisted of emergencies.

What makes the theory so specious is that the United States had not even produced 2,251 B-29 Superfortresses for employment at war's end, making it quite impossible for the airfield on Iwo Jima to have saved 2,251 bombers. In fact, only 1,000 B-29s ever operated from the Marianas at their full capacity. Taking the theory to its full extent, every B-29 bomber and second set of replacements in the Marianas would potentially have been lost without seizing Iwo Jima – an obvious exaggeration which no military leaders at the time nor subsequent historians ever overtly argued. In reality, bomber operations in the Marianas routinely used Iwo Jima for a multitude of purposes other than emergencies, which the Army Air Forces later lumped together when it published the landings and suggested a calculus of lives saved by the invasion.

In reality, B-29s from the Marianas routinely landed on Iwo Jima for operational purposes, not to be considered emergencies. For example, the Army Air Force extended the range of B-29s to northern Japan and even Korea by using Iwo Jima as a refueling stop. It also increased the tonnage of ordnance in B-29s while decreasing fuel supplies – a calculus reinforced by the fact that Iwo Jima served as a safety net. The island also served as a destination for training flights of new air crews stationed in the Marianas. Certainly, some number of B-29s used Iwo Jima when short on fuel or due to the results of battle damage, but those numbers in no way equate to justifying the numbers of lives lost in the island's capture.

What is apparent is that both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Air Force began highlighting B-29 landings on Iwo Jima as early as March of 1945 as the most visible

representation to justify the costly battle. With that publicity effort in mind, the Army Air Force began keeping a tally of every touchdown and commenced publishing these updated numbers until the end of the war. The Army Air Force deliberately inferred that Iwo Jima's single airfield saved as many as 24,751 airmen, even though only 2,148 crewmen died during all of World War II (including those in the Burma-India-China theater). The innate fallacy of the theory is that adding up the total number of landings on Iwo Jima (2,251) and multiplying by the number of crewmen in each bomber (11), can never logically justify the twenty-eight thousand actual U.S. casualties incurred in the island's seizure. One of eight chapters in my book debates the fallacies of the emergency landing theory, and it is further discussed in three of my published articles on the topic.

5. Underscoring the Battle's Legacy

From the beginning of my research, I understood how controversial my argument might be found (particularly coming from an active-duty Marine Corps officer serving as an historian at the U.S. Navy Academy). My research fundamentally questioned the necessity of seizing Iwo Jima, which certainly would open the aperture for others to claim the battle was a costly mistake. While my research put in question previous historical narratives, it never claimed the battle a blunder, but certainly a decision worthy of further reflection. Thus, I made every effort to fairly assess the evidence and present it in a manner where the reader might more rationally appraise the heavy price paid and make their own judgement about the battle's necessity based on the island's subsequent use in the war effort.

Undeniably, Iwo Jima had value to B-29 operations, all of which I highlighted in my published research, but the massive price paid for capturing the island certainly could and

should be questioned by historians. However, the tragedy of Iwo Jima was only half the story. Calamity in battle often brings with it great reverence and honor, at times in a manner which may seem out of all proportion to the lives lost. One such example is illustrated by the annual ceremonies of Australia and New Zealand in their commemoration of the failed amphibious landings against the Ottomans at Gallipoli in 1915. Such misfortune resulted in great reverence for this peculiar historical event – a defeat which both nations view as the genesis of their national identity. In the same way, Iwo Jima served after the war (and even today) as the crucible event and defining moment of the Marine Corps. Simultaneously, the American public identifies Iwo Jima as the Marines’ most iconic battle. The second half of my book argues that the memory and legacy of Iwo Jima emerged to save the institution of the Marine Corps from extinction in the post-war conflict over budgetary resources.

When the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, saw the flag being raised on Mount Suribachi, he reportedly stated, “the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years.” That begs the question, why was the Secretary of the Navy landing on Iwo Jima in the midst of a battle zone, and why was there a question about the future of the U.S. Marine Corps?²⁴ In other words, what institutional—as opposed to strategic-- issues were also at stake in the seizure of this island?²⁵ Certainly, the invasion of Iwo Jima represented the

²⁴ Another fascinating question is why the Marine Corps had such a large number of combat cameramen on Iwo Jima in comparison to other World War II battles. During an interview by *World Media Rights* for the *Netflix* series *Road to Victory* series, Milo Riley-Smith asked me about the nearly two dozen combat camera-men and why there was an over-abundance of footage for this battle in comparison to others. I can only speculate that just as the appearance of the Secretary of the Navy at the battle, the Marine Corps knew quite well the struggle it would have during the unification crisis at war’s end and was intentionally utilizing the publicity value of Iwo Jima as the premier example of amphibious assault ever witnessed.

²⁵ Historian David W. Mills argues that the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, uttered the words about the flag-raising saving the Marine Corps, directly due to the Army having decided to do away with institution after the war (planning for the demise of the Corps as early as 1943). Without any primary evidence on what exactly Forrestal meant, it can certainly be inferred that his comments referred to the debates occurring at the time in Washington

culmination of amphibious assault doctrine through the crucible of four years of war. The invasion would prove the largest Marine Corps operation with three full divisions and a corps headquarters – an operation executed on a grand scale and prosecuted at victory’s doorstep. Marines anticipated that Iwo Jima would fulfill the ambitions of the Corps in the post-war posture of American defense. For these reasons, the Marine Corps had organized a significant public relations component to accompany the invasion, exemplified by the appearance of the Secretary of the Navy on the shore. However, while the assault force certainly solicited positive news stories (including the decision to send combat correspondents along with the platoon which raised the flag over Iwo Jima), no one anticipated the monumental impact of *that* photo.

Many sources recognize the importance of the iconic popularity of Iwo Jima, as seen through Joe Rosenthal’s photo of six Marines raising a flag on Mount Suribachi on 23 February 1945. This photo, which many have characterized as “the most recognized and reproduced image in history,” has evolved into a chronicle unto itself.²⁶ Simultaneously, the symbolic memory of Iwo Jima correspondingly hammered a foundational cornerstone on the legacy of the U.S. Marine Corps. It instilled a reverence in the American population for *their* Marines. In fact, the legacy of Iwo Jima likely served to save the Marine Corps from extinction following World War II. Indeed, Forrestal alluded to the debate over the Corps’ continued existence as he risked his life to stand on the black sands of Iwo Jima in 1945 (just four days into the combat). Back in Washington D.C., the U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, and U.S. Army Air Force had already begun

about the Corp’s future. See David W. Mills, ‘Did Joe Rosenthal Save the Marine Corps? The Existential Fight, 1943-52,’ *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA. 2019), pp. 85-101 (88).

²⁶ Quote from Cyd Upson, ‘Fact or Fiction: Was the Photo of the Iwo Jima Flag-Raising Staged?’ *Fox News*, (19 February 2009) <<https://www.foxnews.com/story/fact-or-fiction-was-the-photo-of-the-iwo-jima-flag-raising-staged>> [Accessed on 17 February 2021].

posturing for postwar functions and resources. And the U.S. Marine Corps looked down from the precipice of Mount Suribachi on the most climatic struggle in its future – a post-war bureaucratic battle for its own survival.



Joe Rosenthal's famous photograph of the second flag raised atop Mount Suribachi²⁷

From 1945 through 1949, the Army, Army Air Force, and Navy fought for supremacy in a new atomic era against a communist threat – an era of defense reorganization dubbed the “unification crisis.” In brief, both the War Department and the Navy Department confronted drastic spending cuts, the Army Air Forces desired autonomy as a separate Service, and the Army sought to absorb all land forces, particularly the Marine Corps. Simultaneously, the U.S.

²⁷ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, p. 134. Original photo taken 23 February 1945 by Joe Rosenthal for Associated Press on top of Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. This photo is now part of the public domain.

Navy faced off against the Army Air Force over control of new atomic capabilities and had little interest in fighting for an amphibious land force. This short period realized the greatest threats to the existence of the Marine Corps in its history. And, the Marine Corps found few friends in either the Navy and War Departments. As an example, the Chief of the Army and future President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, articulated the prevailing mood: “land aspects of major amphibious operations in the future will be undertaken by the Army, and consequently the Marine Corps will not be appreciably expanded in time of war...the Navy will not develop a land army or so-called amphibious Army, [and]...Marine Corps units to be limited in size to the equivalent of a regiment.”²⁸

Fighting for its existence, the Marine Corps made its case to the American people. It made a particular effort to persuade the media and members of the Congress to support its survival. Time and again, newspapers across the country and speeches on the floors of the House and Senate referenced Iwo Jima as the premier example of crusaders in defense of freedom. As written in print and read in Congress, “anyone who questioned its utility should visit Iwo Jima and ‘imagine what it was like when the Marines went in.’”²⁹ The outreach campaign proved so effective that the President eventually banned propaganda or lobbying by members of the Marine Corps in order to stifle debate on its future. However, that did not stop friends of the Corps or even its senior leader from speaking out. As the Commandant publicly proclaimed in in 1947, “the weapon that conquered Iwo Jima was not produced in the vast arsenal of industry, but in the hearts of the American people who are represented there by the

²⁸ Burrell, *Ghost of Iwo Jima*, p. 171.

²⁹ Burrell, *Ghost of Iwo Jima*, p. 167.

finest they could send battle. It is not too much to say that the future of the Marine Corps, of the Navy, or of the Nation itself rests finally not in our hands, but in your hearts.”³⁰

As House Resolution 4214 received approval in the reorganization of the US. Armed Services, it astonishingly provided very specific language on the missions and organization of one particular organization – the Marine Corps. It articulated in congressional law that the Marine Corps would consist of no less than three divisions and three air wings, and that the Corps would have primacy over all aspects of amphibious warfare. This language created a fire storm in the War Department, which had envisioned the final end of its competitor. However, Congress had decided otherwise. Through collective memory, the ghosts of Iwo Jima had arisen to stand in the institution’s defense. The American public would never forget the sacrifices of Marines on Iwo Jima and that powerful iconic image of patriotism. Consequently, I spend three chapters of my book discussing Iwo Jima’s impact and legacy.

6. The Arguments’ Reception

Revising the narrative on Iwo Jima initially received a mixed reception and clashed with previous accounts for a period of around three years before a new consensus solidified around my interpretation. My first publication was released in the *Journal of Military History* in October, 2004.³¹ A few months later in March 2005, Max Boot, a popular author and nationalist ideologue, published his essay “Rethinking the Iwo Jima Myth,” initially released in the *Los Angeles Times* but picked up by other periodicals.³² Boot utilizes the *Journal of Military History*

³⁰ Burrell, *Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, p. 169.

³¹ Burrell, ‘Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology.’

³² Max Boot, “Rethinking the Iwo Jima Myth,” *Los Angeles Times*, (10 March 2005) <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-mar-10-oe-boot10-story.html>> [Accessed on 6 January 2021].

article to surmise that “in modern parlance, you might say that Iwo Jima was a battle of choice waged on the basis of faulty intelligence and inadequate plans.” Boot further states that my research “demolishes” the emergency landing theory. Bringing my scholarly argument into the mainstream media, Max Boot provided widespread publicity to the research (one not likely common to research published in scholastic journals). The article was republished on *History News Network*, a publishing arm of George Washington University,³³ and received further attention in other forums, like that of *Radical History Review*.³⁴

On 14 April 2005, *The Society for Military History* awarded the 2005 *Moncado Prize* for my *Journal of Military History* article.³⁵ This prize was awarded to the four best articles published in the preceding year. Concurrently, the *Marine Corps Heritage Foundation* awarded the 2005 *Colonel Robert Debs Heinl Jr. Award* for the same article.³⁶ This award was also provided to the author of the best article pertinent to Marine Corps history published in the previous year. These honors spelled good omens, but the revised narrative had not yet received wide acceptance.

The first negative response came quickly in the *Journal of Military History* in July 2005 by Brian Hanley, an active-duty U.S. Air Force officer and faculty member at Joint Forces Staff College in Virginia.³⁷ In a passionate and vindictive argument, Hanley asserts that “the United States had no choice but to take Iwo Jima” and that service-rivalry had little impact in the

³³ Max Boot, ‘Iwo Jima: A Battle of Choice Waged on the Basis of Faulty Intelligence and Bad Planning,’ *History News Network* <<https://historynewsnetwork.org/articles/10693.html?page=4>> [Accessed on 18 December 2020].

³⁴ R. J. Lambrose, ‘The Abusable Past,’ *Radical History Review*, 94 (2006), pp. 261-264.

³⁵ Robert H. Berlin, ‘Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the Executive Director of the Society for Military History,’ *Society for Military*, (14 April 2005).

³⁶ G. R. Christmas, ‘Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the President of Marine Corps Heritage Foundation,’ *Marine Corps Heritage Foundation*, (14 April 2005).

³⁷ Brian Hanley, ‘The Myth of Iwo Jima: A Rebuttal,’ *Journal of Military History*, 69 (2005), pp. 801-809.

decision to seize it. Hanley was particularly disturbed by the assertion that “all previous accounts have been not merely incomplete but essentially a collective act of self-deception by students of the battle.” Hanley was opposed to revisionism or what he described as “retrospective criticism” of the conflict, and he was particularly vexed by my article’s contention that service-rivalry influenced the U.S. Army Air Force in their advocacy of the invasion. Hanley overtly maintained that the preceding Iwo Jima narrative should remain unchanged. Fortunately, the *Journal of Military History* solicited my response to Hanley, which was published concurrently with his rebuttal.

Despite this criticism, the revised narrative continued to receive acclaim. On 6 September 2005, the *Naval Historical Center* and *Naval Historical Foundation* issued the *Rear Admiral Ernest M. Eller Naval History Prize* for the article.³⁸ This award went to the most deserving article on naval history in the preceding year. In his note of congratulations, the Director of Naval History states that the article “makes excellent use of primary materials maintained in the collections of the Navy and Marine Corps and the National Archives, oral histories, and the best secondary sources.”

In 2006, Texas A&M Press published *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*, a full extension of the revised chronicle of the battle published previously in *Journal of Military History*, but also a comprehensive discussion of Iwo Jima’s lasting legacy. The first review came from Thomas B. Allen in *Proceedings* magazine.³⁹ Allen, a prolific author, restates the arguments in the book, including: the service-rivalry that led to the islands capture, the falsehoods of the emergency

³⁸ P. E. Tobin, ‘Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the Director of Naval History,’ *Naval Historical Center*, (6 September 2005).

³⁹ Thomas B. Allen, ‘The Ghosts of Iwo Jima,’ *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 132 (November 2006), p. 80.

landing theory, and the subsequent importance of the flag-raising to institutional memory. He concludes that the book “produces a classic demonstration of the inter-service rivalry that often befogged strategic decisions in the Pacific.”

Another review of the book came in mid-2007 by James Oman, a U.S. Army Colonel and Chairman of the Leadership Department at the U.S. Army War College, in the Army’s professional magazine *Parameters*.⁴⁰ The positive review states that “this exceptionally well-researched work describes in meticulous detail the sometimes disturbing and often contentious strategic decisionmaking process leading to the decision to execute Operation Detachment, the seizure of Iwo Jima.” Oman describes the work as “a superb book providing fresh insight into a frequently studied battle.” At the same time, he surmises that, while “Burrell’s research and presentation reveals unflattering aspects associated with the battle for Iwo Jima, it does not denigrate or diminish the personal courage, sacrifice, and valor demonstrated by so many who participated, and rightfully so.”

Shawn P. Callahan, a Marine officer and history instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy, published his review of the book in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in July 2007.⁴¹ Callahan reinforces the book’s arguments, particularly the logical flaws in the emergency landing theory, stating “Burrell proves that this figure is, at very best, highly unlikely, forcing the reader to face the fact that there is deeper tragedy to this battle than the heroic sacrifice of lives.” He goes on to state, “many Marines, when faced with the notion that our most hallowed battle may actually have been a costly mistake, will undoubtedly denounce Burrell’s work as heresy and refuse to

⁴⁰ James R. Oman, ‘The Ghosts of Iwo Jima,’ *Parameters: U.S. Army War College*, 37 (Summer 2007), pp. 116–118.

⁴¹ Shawn P. Callahan, ‘A Legend Reexamined,’ *Marine Corps Gazette*, 91 (July 2007), p. 62.

consider it further. This would be an error, for *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* is not an act of irresponsible revisionism.” Subsequently, Callahan discussed the second half of my research on the lasting legacy of Iwo Jima.

In August 2007, Gregory J. W. Urwin, a military historian at Temple University, reviewed the book in *Pacific Historical Review*.⁴² In his analysis, Urwin states, “in a devastatingly brilliant work of revision, Robert S. Burrell...dissects the post-battle rationalizations and myths that have long hidden the fact that Iwo Jima turned out to be an objective not worth the prices paid for it.” Further, “Burrell undermines the assumptions that have supported the literature on Iwo Jima for more than two generations.” And finally, Urwin adds a more definitive endorsement: “*Ghosts of Iwo Jima* stands as a model for reevaluating the formulation of American strategy in World War II.”

In October 2007, Kenneth Estes reviewed the book in what had become the primary battleground over the narrative, the *Journal of Military History*.⁴³ Estes is a retired Marine officer, prolific writer, and former instructor at Duke University. Estes first details the major arguments of the book, stating that both “debunking the conventional justifications” for the battle and then detailing the mythology of the flag-raising both “have merit.” He then proceeds to take issue with the sources utilized and how the information is presented. Estes’s review attempts to elaborate further on the criticism by Brian Hanley in the *Journal of Military History* in July 2005, which he specifically identifies. His primary disapproval derives from an

⁴² Gregory J. W. Urwin, ‘Review of Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*,’ *Pacific Historical Review*, 76 (2007), pp. 507–509.

⁴³ Kenneth W. Estes, “The Ghosts of Iwo Jima Robert S. Burrell,” *The Journal of Military History*, 71 (2007), pp. 1297–1299.

aversion for revising the original narrative. He states, “Burrell’s workmanlike effort to assess the strategic value of a single island battle of the war may err in that so many islands ‘had’ to be taken at one time or another, based upon what the soldiers and sailors thought they were doing at the time they were doing it, not on the basis of postmortem reasoning.” Generally, he argues that the book unfairly cherry-picked for supporting information while intentionally disregarded relevant opposing facts. Finally, he dubs the work a “polemic.”

World War II magazine published a commemorative edition solely on Iwo Jima in November of 2007. This provided me an opportunity to publish again with “Did We Have to Fight Here,” which summarized the arguments in *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* for general public consumption.⁴⁴ Additionally, the essay added commentary about the battle from my reflections atop Mount Suribachi (made during one of the many battle tours I conducted for the Marine Corps between 2005 and 2008). This article argued that although the public should question the decision to seize the island, especially with regard to the high cost, the fortitude shown by the Marines in 1945 lived on in the spirit of subsequent generations. In late 2007, I published on the battle again in *Military History Quarterly* in an article titled “Worth the Cost?”⁴⁵ This article mirrored many of the comments I made in *World War II* magazine in a further effort to extend my academic research and argument to the general public.

Subsequently, in December 2007, Mark Grimsley published an article “What if the Marines had Bypassed Iwo Jima?” in *World War II* magazine.⁴⁶ Using the research in my book, Grimsley restates many of the arguments, particularly the now defunct reasons provided for

⁴⁴ Burrell, ‘Did We Have to Fight Here?’

⁴⁵ Burrell, ‘Worth the Cost?’

⁴⁶ Mark Grimsley, ‘What if the Marines had Bypassed Iwo Jima,’ *World War II*, (December 2007), pp. 91-94.

taking the island, particularly the “emergency landing theory.” In so doing, Grimsley sets the stage for exploring the possibility of bypassing Iwo Jima in 1945. He concludes that “had Iwo Jima been bypassed, the Pacific War would have ended at much the same time and in much the same way.” Moreover, he argues that “the battle of Iwo Jima, although a high point for American valor, was a low point for American strategy.” After three years of debate, the stage had finally been set for a new and revised narrative of the battle to achieve dominance.

Of significance to this period between 2004 and 2007, Iwo Jima went through something of a resurgence in public interest. Medal of honor winner Jack Lucas, published his memoirs, *Indestructible: The Unforgettable Story of a Marine Hero at the Battle of Iwo Jima* (which I reviewed in *World War II* magazine).⁴⁷ As well, popular historian Eric Hammel released *Iwo Jima: Portrait of a Battle, United States Marines at War in the Pacific* (2006), with over 500 combat photographs – the majority previously unseen.⁴⁸ Likewise, there were two popular films directed by Clint Eastwood on the battle. The first was *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), based on the book of the same name written by James Bradley.⁴⁹ The second Eastwood movie was *Letters From Iwo Jima* (2006), a Japanese-centered account with English subtitles.⁵⁰ In an interview, Eastwood was asked if he had read my arguments and agreed with the assumption that “we might have been better off skipping Iwo.”⁵¹ Eastwood made no indication that my arguments had influenced him, but appears to have been aware of them. One critic of Eastwood’s film

⁴⁷ Robert S. Burrell, ‘Lucky in War Not Love,’ *World War II*, 21 (March 2007), pp. 66–67.

⁴⁸ Eric M. Hammel, *Iwo Jima: Portrait of a Battle, United States Marines at War in the Pacific*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ *Flags of Our Fathers*, dir. by Clint Eastwood (DreamWorks Pictures, 2007).

⁵⁰ *Letters from Iwo Jima*, dir. By Clint Eastwood (Warner Home Video, 2007).

⁵¹ David Grogan, ‘Interview: Clint Eastwood,’ *World War II Magazine: Special Iwo Jima Edition*, (November 2006), pp. 21.

Flags of Our Fathers disapproved of the continued glorification of the flag-raising icon, something David Morris strongly felt that the United States had inappropriately done previously during the war. Morris states that “some historians have argued that one reason the Rosenthal photo was distributed by the U.S. government was to deflect attention from the argument that Iwo Jima was an unnecessary slaughter” – a recognizable reference to my recent arguments, and now used as supporting evidence by Morris.⁵² By 2008, the recognized narrative on Iwo Jima had begun a transformation, with historians, academics, and the general public gradually integrating the arguments from my research.

CONCLUSION

Between 2008 and 2020, at least 751 publications have discussed Iwo Jima in magazines, news, reviews, books, and academic journals.⁵³ Obviously, this battle, which occurred in an obscure region of the Pacific, continues to inspire national and international interest. However, the narrative decisively changed following the publication of my research. According to *Google Scholar*, at least 52 books, articles, and films have referenced my work.⁵⁴ Without any opposing study to dispute the revised strategic aspects of the battle, Iwo Jima is no longer described in scholarly publications as “inevitable” or even necessary. Additionally, the emergency landing theory has no further relevance and is widely considered defunct. Recent scholars’ estimations of the battle’s importance have rightly centered on: (1) the tragic and brutal loss of life incurred; (2) on the courage of the battle participants, and (3) on the power of

⁵² David Morris, ‘The Image as History: Clint Eastwood's Unmaking of an American Myth,’ *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 83 (2007), pp. 94-107 (107).

⁵³ Electronic search on United States Operations Command Library made on 28 December 2020.

⁵⁴ Search made on Google Scholar to include the book *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* and the article ‘Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment’ <<https://scholar.google.com/citations>> [Accessed on 4 January 2021].

the flag-raising iconography. Fortunately, all three of these continue to complement and give credit to my research.

Richard B. Frank, a Pacific War historian, wrote an article on Iwo Jima for *Naval History* magazine in 2010.⁵⁵ Frank stated that the strategic value of the island was in support of B-29 Superfortress operations, but he made no mention of the emergency landing theory. He also revised the losses on Iwo Jima more in line with my research by accepting that Japanese continued to fight long after the Marines had left the island. He concluded that “ominously, for the first time the Japanese inflicted more casualties than they sustained against an amphibious assault,” one of the themes from my studies.

In 2017, Douglas E. Nash published an article about the 147th Infantry Regiment, a garrison detachment on Iwo Jima.⁵⁶ Although Nash fails to cite my research, this regiment had received little historical scrutiny until the release of my book in 2006. In fact, the number Japanese killed and captured on the island in the months following the battle – by this particular unit-- was key evidence in revising Japanese casualties. Nash, an historian at the *Marine Corps History Division*, completes an excellent study on the 147th. However, nowhere mentioned is the “emergency landing theory” or an argument about the island’s strategic importance to subsequent war effort. These omissions, particularly from a Marine Corps historian, indicate that previously uncontested “facts” could no longer be unquestionably inserted into Iwo Jima’s narrative.

⁵⁵ Richard B. Frank, ‘The Marines’ Most Famous Battle,’ *Naval History*, 24 (April 2010), pp. 58–59.

⁵⁶ Douglas E. Nash Sr. ‘Army Boots on Volcanic Sands: The 147th Infantry Regiment at Iwo Jima,’ *Army History*, 105 (October 2017), pp. 6–19. Also see, Nash’s ‘Going to “Tojo’s Front Door”’: Recalling the U.S. Army’s Role and the Flag Raising at Iwo Jima,’ *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), pp. 27-44.

In February 2020, Mark Folse, a historian at the U.S. Naval Academy, published an anniversary article on the battle in *Naval History* magazine.⁵⁷ Heavily citing my work, Folse concludes that the battle may or may have not been necessary, but that should not detract on the importance of the U.S. victory, which “represented the fulfillment of a long-sought role for the Corps.” In short, Folse portrays the battle in line with my arguments made fifteen years earlier – controversial at the time but no longer so.

Authoritative internet sites provide more convincing evidence that my scholarship has significantly revised received wisdom on Iwo Jima. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* uses my research and name prominently.⁵⁸ It revises the total Japanese casualties to 18,500. It dubs the battle a “pyrrhic victory” and demolishes the emergency landing theory. *Wikipedia* also utilizes my name and research directly in the text, as well as providing a citation.⁵⁹ The term “emergency landing theory” and my arguments against it are a centerpiece of the webpage. It also acknowledges that an estimated 3,000 of the 21,000 Japanese defenders survived the battle, providing context to actual casualties in comparison with U.S. losses.

Most interestingly, the official Marine Corps history on Iwo Jima has finally turned a corner. In 2019, the *Marine Corps History Division* released *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps*.⁶⁰ This lengthy edited book (and 75th Anniversary Commemoration to the battle) references my work fourteen times, but the content highlights

⁵⁷ Mark Folse, ‘The Common Will Triumphant,’ *Naval History*, 34 (February 2020), pp. 14–19.

⁵⁸ ‘Battle of Iwo Jima,’ *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Battle-of-Iwo-Jima>> [Accessed on 29 December 2020].

⁵⁹ ‘Battle of Iwo Jima,’ *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Iwo_Jima> [Accessed on 28 December 2020].

⁶⁰ Breanne Roberson, *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019).

my contribution to the narrative even further. In chapters like “Did Joe Rosenthal Save the Marine Corps?,” historian David Mills from *U.S. Army Command and General Staff College* essentially echoes and reinforces the arguments I made in the second half of my book about the importance the icon had in preserving the Marine Corps through the bitter post-war unification crisis.⁶¹ In another example, the introductory essay by historian Charles Neimeyer utilizes my research to ensure the narrative on casualty numbers were correctly presented and that the emergency landing theory remained deceased.⁶² These essays make clear that my investigative research made a lasting impact on the history of this battle.

Word count 9985

⁶¹ Mills, pp. 85-101.

⁶² Charles P. Neimeyer, ‘Black Sand and Blood: The 36-day Battle for Iwo Jima, 19 February-26 March 1945,’ *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), pp. 5-26.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Thomas B., 'The Ghosts of Iwo Jima,' *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 132 (2006), 80.
- Bartley, William S., *Iwo Jima: Amphibious Epic* (Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1954).
- 'Battle of Iwo Jima' (2003), *Wikipedia*
<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Battle_of_Iwo_Jima&oldid=1541627>
- 'Battle of Iwo Jima,' *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Iwo_Jima [Accessed on 28 December 2020].
- 'Battle of Iwo Jima,' *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Battle-of-Iwo-Jima>> [Accessed on 29 December 2020].
- Berlin, Robert H., 'Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the Executive Director of the Society for Military History,' *Society for Military*, (14 April 2005).
- Boot, Max, 'Rethinking the Iwo Jima Myth,' *Los Angeles Times*, (10 March 2005).
- Boot, Max, 'Iwo Jima: A Battle of Choice Waged on the Basis of Faulty Intelligence and Bad Planning,' *History News Network*
<<https://historynewsnetwork.org/articles/10693.html?page=4>> [Accessed on 18 Dec. 2020].
- Bowerman, Mary, 'Marines Investigate Iconic Iwo Jima Photo,' *USA Today*, (4 May 2016).
- Bradley, James and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (Bantam Books, 2000).
- Burrell, Robert S., 'Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment,' *Journal of Military History*, 68 (2004), 1143–1186.
- Burrell, Robert S., 'Did We Have to Fight Here?,' *World War II Magazine: Special Iwo Jima Edition*, (November 2006), 60-67.
- Burrell, Robert S., *Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (Texas A&M University Press, 2006).
- Burrell, Robert S., 'Lucky in War Not Love,' *World War II*, 21 (March 2007), 66–67.
- Burrell, Robert S., 'Worth the Cost?' *Military History Quarterly*, (Winter 2007), 48-59.
- Callahan, Shawn P., 'A Legend Reexamined,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, 91 (July 2007), 62.

- Christmas, G.R., 'Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the President of Marine Corps Heritage Foundation,' *Marine Corps Heritage Foundation*, (14 April 2005).
- Dower, John W., *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
- Estes, Kenneth W. "The Ghosts of Iwo Jima Robert S. Burrell," *The Journal of Military History*, 71 (2007), 1297–1299.
- Flags of Our Fathers*, dir. by Clint Eastwood (DreamWorks Pictures, 2007).
- Folse, Mark., 'The Common Will Triumphant,' *Naval History*, 34 (February 2020), 14–19.
- Frank, Richard B., 'The Marines' Most Famous Battle,' *Naval History*, 24 (April 2010), 58–59.
- Garand, George W. and Truman R. Strobridge, *Western Pacific Operation* (Historical Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1971).
- Gentry, Keil R., "'In Fairness to All Parties": The Marine Corps Corrects the Historical Record,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corp* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), 218-250.
- Grimsley, Mark, 'What if the Marines had Bypassed Iwo Jima,' *World War II*, (December 2007), 91-94.
- Grogan, David, 'Interview: Clint Eastwood,' *World War II Magazine: Special Iwo Jima Edition*, (November 2006), 16-21.
- Hammel, Eric M., *Iwo Jima: Portrait of a Battle, United States Marines at War in the Pacific* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2006).
- Hanley, Brian and Robert S. Burrell, 'The Myth of Iwo Jima: A Rebuttal [And Response],' *The Journal of Military History*, 69 (2005), 801-809.
- Henri, Raymond, James G. Lucas, Davide K. Dempsy, W. Keys Beech, and Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima* (New York: Dial Press, 1945).
- Hoffman, Jon T., 'The Legacy and Lessons of Iwo Jima,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, 79 (February 1995), 72-77.
- Hough, Frank O., *The Island War: The United States Marine Corps in the Pacific* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1947).
- Isely, Jeter Allen and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton University Press, 1951).

- Lambrose, R. J., 'The Abusable Past,' *Radical History Review*, 94 (Winter 2006), 261-264.
- Letters from Iwo Jima*, dir. by Clint Eastwood (Warner Home Video, 2007).
- Lundberg, Timothy, 'Remembering Iwo Jima and Its Importance to Strategic Air Power,' *Andersen Air Force Base website*, (3 March 2010)
<<https://www.andersen.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/415598/remembering-iwo-jima-and-its-importance-to-strategic-airpower>> [Accessed on 21 February 2021].
- Marling, Karal Ann and John Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Harvard University Press, 1994).
- Mills, David "Did Joe Rosenthal Save the Marine Corps?: The Existential Fight, 1943–52," *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA.), 85-101.
- Morris, David, 'The Image as History: Clint Eastwood's Unmaking of an American Myth,' *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 83 (2007), 94-107.
- Nash Sr., Douglas E., 'Army Boots on Volcanic Sands: The 147th Infantry Regiment at Iwo Jima,' *Army History*, 105 (October), 6–19.
- Nash Sr., Douglas E., 'Going to "Tojo's Front Door": Recalling the U.S. Army's Role and the Flag Raising at Iwo Jima,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), 27-44.
- Neimeyer, Charles P., 'Black Sand and Blood: The 36-day Battle for Iwo Jima, 19 February-26 March 1945,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), 5-26.
- Newcomb, Richard F., *Iwo Jima* (New York: Hot, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965).
- Oman, James R., 'The Ghosts of Iwo Jima,' *Parameters: U.S. Army War College*, 37 (Summer 2007), 116–118.
- Reinwald, Mary H., 'Correcting the Record: The Huly Panel Looks at the Iwo Jima Flag Raisings,' *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019), 195-217.
- Roberson, Breanne, *Investigating Iwo: The Flag Raisings in Myth, Memory, and Esprit de Corps* (Marine Corps History Division: Quantico, VA, 2019).
- Ross, Bill D., *Iwo Jima: Legacy of Valor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).
- Spector, Ronald H., *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (Free Press, 1985).

Tobin, P. E. 'Letter to Robert S. Burrell from the Director of Naval History,' *Naval Historical Center* (6 September 2005).

Upton, Cyd. 'Fact or Fiction: Was the Photo of the Iwo Jima Flag-Raising Staged?,' *Fox News*, (19 February 2009, <<https://www.foxnews.com/story/fact-or-fiction-was-the-photo-of-the-iwo-jima-flag-raising-staged>> [Accessed on 17 Feb. 2021].

Urwin, Gregory J. W., 'Review of Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 76 (2007), 507–509.

APPENDIX i. Published Works

[Emboldened items submitted herewith]

Burrell, Robert S. 'How to Integrate Competition and Irregular Warfare" Modern Warfare Institute (5 August 2021) <<https://mwi.usma.edu/how-to-integrate-competition-and-irregular-warfare>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'From "Stability Operations" to "Stabilization Activities": Why and How the Department of Defense changed its Doctrine and Policies,' *LinkedIn* (30 April 2021) <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/from-stability-operations-stabilization-activities-why-robert-burrell>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'Joint Doctrine for Unconventional Warfare 2.0,' *LinkedIn* (6 October 2020) <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/joint-doctrine-unconventional-warfare-20-robert-burrell>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'Revisiting FSSG Dinosaurs," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (December 2014), 47-49 <<https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/415032-December-2014.pdf>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'Joint Doctrine for Unconventional Warfare,' *Air Land Sea Bulletin*, (January 2013), 4-9 <<https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=758497>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'Combat Logistics Patrols: Leadership, Management, and Technical Proficiency,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, (March 2011).

Burrell, Robert S., *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (Texas A&M Press, 2006).

Burrell, Robert S., 'Worth the Cost?' *Military History Quarterly*, (Winter 2007), 48-59.

Burrell, Robert S., 'Did We Have to Fight Here?' *World War II Magazine: Special Iwo Jima Edition*, (November 2006), 60-67.

Burrell, Robert S., 'Ernest J. King: Ambition,' *Leadership Embodied: The Secrets to Success of the Most Effective Navy and Marine Corps Leaders*, edited by Joseph J. Thomas (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 108-111.

Hanley, Brian and Robert S. Burrell, 'The Myth of Iwo Jima: A Rebuttal [And Response]," *The Journal of Military History*, 69 (2005), 801-809.

Burrell, Robert S., 'Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment,' *Journal of Military History*, 68 (2004), 1143-1186.

Burrell, Robert S., *Crucibles: Selected Readings in U.S. Marine Corps History*, 2nd edition, (Academx Publishing, 2004).

Burrell Robert S., and Ted Veggeberg, 'Finding the Best Relationship with U.S. Naval Academy,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, (April 2004), 31-36.

Burrell, Robert S., *Crucibles: Selected Readings in U.S. Marine Corps History*, 1st edition (Academx Publishing, 2003).

Burrell, Robert S., 'Operation Galvanic: Remembering Tarawa Sixty Years Later,' *Shipmate*, (November 2003), 20-25.

Burrell, Robert S., 'Combat Service Support in Transition,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, (June 2002), 60-67 <<https://mca-marines.org/blog/gazette/combat-service-support-in-transition>>

Burrell, Robert S., 'Understanding the Miracle at Midway,' *Shipmate*, (June 2002), 8-14.

Appendix ii. Background

Postgraduate U.S. Naval War College, Newport Rhode Island, Massachusetts
San Diego State University, San Diego, California

Undergraduate Simpson University, Redding, California

Employment

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY, Tampa, Florida
Instructor, Irregular Warfare

U.S. EMBASSY, Canberra Australia
Attaché, U.S. Marine Corps

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND, Tampa Florida
Editor in Chief, Special Operations Doctrine

U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY, Annapolis Maryland
Instructor, History Department

U.S. Marine Corps, various locations
Officer and Historian