

Iwo Jima One More Time



Mount Suribachi looms off the right wing of the March 3, 2010, charter flight bringing veterans of the Battle of Iwo Jima, family, friends and historians to Iwo Jima, "Sulphur Island," to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the iconic WW II battle.

By Chuck Beveridge

I glanced out the window for an instant as the airline charter flight banked on its final approach before landing on Iwo Jima. I had been wondering for almost a year what this day would be like, and already it wasn't even close to what I had imagined.

First, the island looked almost like a Pacific paradise with its lush, green landscape. It did not look at all like it did in February 1945. No one was shooting at us; the Navy wasn't offshore bombarding the island. No strafing aircraft. No napalm. No low-level bombing runs. Aboard this flight were women and men of all ages, including a 9-year-old boy, Brian Mundell from Terre Haute, Ind., as well as 22 veterans of the Iwo campaign. No one was packing weapons, ammo or rations, only sunscreen and digital cameras. Yes, this trip to Iwo certainly was different.

Had it not been for Military Historical Tours Inc., led by Colonel Warren Wiedhahn, USMC (Ret), and his dedicated crew, Anne Swensen and Jack Powell, we would not be here. MHT was on top of everything from left to finish, including

Right: Cy O'Brien (left), age 91, was with 3dMarDiv on Iwo, and Chuck Beveridge, age 84, hit Iwo's beaches with 4thMarDiv.

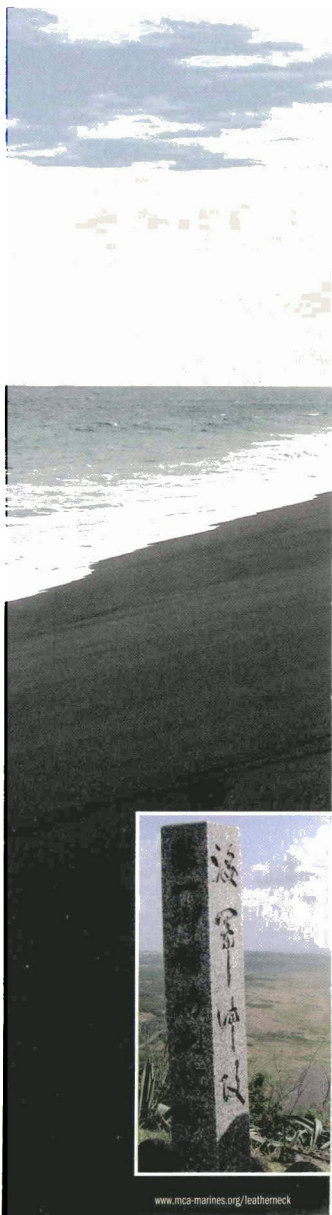
Far right: Members of the "Young Marines" render honors during ceremonies atop Mount Suribachi.

the tours around Guam, the endless water supply, the great breakfasts and the briefings of each day's events prior to our charter flight to Iwo Jima.

Once we cleared customs on Iwo To (the new Japan-assigned name for Iwo Jima), the Iwo veterans were each matched with a Marine guide. I was very lucky to have a Marine private first class as my guide. The first thing we did was climb into a Marine Corps van and drive to the top of Mount Suribachi. (This was done on a paved road; we didn't have to claw our way up carrying weapons.)

One thing I learned was that the Japanese had tried for years to carve a road to the top of Mount Suribachi and failed miserably. It took the 133d Construction Battalion only three days to accomplish the task in 1945. Now, it even has been paved. Who cares that they drive on the wrong side of the road? The road is so narrow that you drive in the middle anyway until you meet an oncoming vehicle.

Arriving at the summit was a very poignant moment. This was the place where Lou Lowery took the original flag-raising picture. Also at the top of Mount Suribachi on this bright and sunny day in 2010 was



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In this tranquil scene, it's difficult to envision Marines assaulting from the sea across these black sands, under the devastating fires from Mount Suribachi—but they came and they conquered. (Photo courtesy of Bob Arnwine)





In the front row (from the left) are retired LtGen Lawrence F. Snowden, who commanded Co F, 23d Marines as a captain on Iwo Jima, and Col Richard Rothwell, 97, who commanded 2/24, 4thMarDiv. Next to them is Gen James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

another friend. A Marine who also was on Iwo Jima back in 1945, and who had written for *Leatherneck* during the war, Cyril "Cy" "Obie" O'Brien, was there. At 91 years of age, Cy is still grinding out stories for *Leatherneck* readers.

I first met Obie at a *Leatherneck* reunion dinner held in conjunction with the annual United States Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association in Northern Virginia back in 2007. (Sadly, there are no active-duty Marines on the staff of *Leatherneck* anymore.)

After taking some pictures of the Marine memorial atop Suribachi, we headed down to the beach near where the 65th

Reunion of Honor ceremony took place.

I made one mistake on this journey, and that was walking down to the beach to get some sand. Oh, I got some sand all right. If it hadn't been for my active-duty Marine guide, along with another Marine, who got me back on my feet after I fell, then I would not have been able to make the trek back to the main road without them. (It took only 10 minutes to walk down to the beach but 45 minutes to return to the top where I started.)

Being back on that beach brought back many memories. I was on the beach for only 90 minutes on D-day before I was wounded. As a matter of fact, I may be

the only Marine wounded on D-day while drinking a beer!

I arrived on Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945, but the journey actually began in early April 1943. When I completed boot camp, I received orders to engineer school at Camp Lejeune, N.C., where I attended camouflage school.

After that school, I reported for duty at Tent City (Camp Geiger) in Jacksonville, N.C., with Company D, 2d Battalion, 20th Marine Engineers (later part of the Fourth Marine Division) where I became a member of a .30-caliber light-machine-gun squad. We shipped out to Camp Pendleton, Calif., in late summer of '43. The 20th Marines was dismantled and split into two battalions: 4th Engineer Bn and 4th Pioneer Bn. We became Co D, 4th Pioneer Bn.

We made three landings with the 4thMarDiv at Roi-Namur in the Marshalls, Saipan and Tinian in the Mariana Islands. After nearly being killed in each operation, I asked for and received a transfer to the heavy-engineer school. I was assigned a TD18 bulldozer. About a week later it was armor plated.

In December 1944, after Tinian, and getting replacements and training on Maui, we began combat loading for yet another campaign. The Navy sent LSM-206 to Maui to carry some of the heavy equipment. Three other equipment operators from Co D and I were the only Marines to load on this LSM. Also loading would be 47 Seabees from the 133d Construction Bn. Two Bay City swing cranes and other pieces of heavy equipment were loaded. I remember thinking that those Seabees, who entered the Navy as skilled professionals, were really old.

While waiting at Pearl Harbor for the

On Feb. 19, 1945, Chuck Beveridge (third from the right) didn't know what he, as a bulldozer operator, was doing in the assault waves—but he didn't have long to wonder because he was shot and evacuated. (Courtesy of Chuck Beveridge)



balance of the division to be combat loaded, we found out we were originally to have loaded onto LSM-202. However, it was damaged in an explosion a few days before sailing to Maui to load us. LSM-202 should have been loaded with heavy equipment, and LSM-206 should have been loaded with tanks.

That, in itself, was not a problem. The problem was that the infantry received bulldozers, cherry pickers, two Bay City swing cranes and additional heavy equipment instead of tanks when LSM-206 went ashore with the third wave. Who knows when the LSM carrying its load of tanks finally reached shore?

Soon after hitting the Iwo beach, I lost both bulldozer mufflers to enemy fire. With no room to move, it became evident that the equipment should not have been there yet. The infantry was still on the beach. How could they use all that heavy equipment, including two swing cranes with 70-foot booms and hooks dangling from cables, with no armor or firepower?

I shut down the engine, climbed off my dozer and made my way to a huge Seabee D6 bulldozer parked next to a couple bales of airstrip matting and began to dig in. That was when I discovered that the sand was more like cinders. Every shovelful scooped out had three-quarters of its contents fall back in. Digging in was a very slow process.

We almost had finished digging when three officers jumped into our hole, pulled out maps and began setting up a command post. After shouting at them for taking our hole, I decided to move near the crane where we had stashed a couple of cases of beer.

Once we got there, we dug another hole for cover, and I climbed on the tracks of the crane to reach the cab where we had stashed the beer. Suddenly, there was a large explosion, and the shrapnel punched 40 or 50 various-sized holes in the cab. I felt like I was inside a saltshaker looking out.

I turned to my Seabee friend Frank J. "Sully" Sullivan and yelled, "You want some beer? You can climb in and get it!" He did just that and came out with a case.

I opened the cans and passed out the beer. I finally opened one for myself, and just as I had placed the can to my lips, a mortar shell exploded behind me. A piece of shrapnel hit the back of my right shoulder, knocking me flat on my face. I passed out, and when I came to, a corpsman was patching me up.

Remembering I had been hit while drinking a beer, I laughed. It became a laughing jag. Before realizing it, I was on an evacuation boat and then on a hospital ship offshore. By the time I reached the



GEORGE HAWARD

Prior to departing Guam for the commemorative ceremonies, two veteran Chuck Beveridge responded to curious questions at the Outrigger Guam Resort.

hospital ship, I knew that I wasn't hurt badly and asked to return to duty.

On my fifth day, I heard that a flag had been raised atop Mount Suribachi. I immediately went topside, and, sure enough, Old Glory was flying atop that rock.

The Navy finally said I was fit for duty. After 12 days I returned to my outfit.

On the Military Historical Tours Inc. Reunion of Honor, I saw Marines I had not seen since December 1944 on Maui. Everyone thought I'd been killed on Iwo because they'd seen me with a corpsman looking for an evacuation boat. They said it looked like a John Wayne movie where sand is kicked up by enemy machine-gun fire as Marines move along the beach. Those men had not seen me aboard the evacuation boat, and they had not seen me since D-day.

On the return flight to Guam I reflected on the day's festivities. Returning to Iwo Jima after 65 years to honor my fallen comrades was more poignant than I expected. I am most thankful that I went.

Editor's note: Chuck Beveridge joined the Marine Corps in 1943 and initially was assigned as a .30-cal. machine-gunner. He became a heavy-equipment operator in the autumn of 1944. He came to Leatherneck as a mail-truck driver and worked to have his MOS changed to artist/illustrator. He left Leatherneck in 1952 only to return for a second tour in 1952. He became the Leatherneck art director in 1954 and continued until discharged in 1957. He remains very active in design and layout. You'll see him credited for the layout and production of the 2009 edition of the Marine Corps Association's "Guidebook for Marines."

For more information on Col Warren Wiedhahn's Military Historical Tours, visit the Web site: www.miltours.com.



Leatherneck—On the Web

See the Iwo Return photos at www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/iworeturn