



THE BLACK SANDS BROADCAST

A publication of the Iwo Jima Association of America



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Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima — Mount Suribachi, 23 February 1945. Public-domain wartime photograph.

From the Association

The Iwo Jima Association of America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to preserving, commemorating, and perpetuating the history and legacy of the Battles for Iwo Jima and the Pacific Islands, and the veterans who fought. Through reunions, the Reunion of Honor on Iwo To, educational outreach, and publications, IJAA keeps that memory alive for veterans, descendants, students, and the public.

In This Broadcast

- Heros Among Us, Stars That Will Never Fade
- In Memoriam: Cpl Dorsey O'Neal Walker
- Iwo Jima Association of America Legacy Project

Save These Dates

[19-20 Feb, 2027] — 82nd Anniversary Reunion: 2027 Anniversary Reunion & Symposium

Arlington, Virginia

[TBD ~March 2027] — Iwo Jima 82nd Anniversary Reunion of Honor

Iwo To (Iwo Jima), Japan

Details and registration:

iwojimaassociation.org

Feature — Heros Among Us, Stars That Will Never Fade

By Private First Class Dale Faughn

Private First Class Dale Faughn was born in 1925 in Lyon County, Kentucky (Lamasco Village). After graduating from high school, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps at age 18.



My story begins the night before the invasion. I was with my buddies from my unit on the ship in what is called “below-decks”, meaning down inside the ship where the berthing compartments are at. This is where you'll find all the bunks one on top of the other where Marines are typically stacked like sardines in a tin can.

My buddies and I were told the night before that we were going to invade Iwo Jima, a tiny island out in the middle of nowhere. The officers didn't go into specifics about the Japanese on the island. No one thought for a second that the battle would end up being as ferocious as it became. It was my first battle, but many other veterans in my unit thought it would be just another island battle. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing significant about our target. Like a typical 19-year-old, I didn't think too much about my family, all I thought about was my job at hand and I never questioned whether I was up to the task. Just before I fell asleep, I thought to myself “this would be the end of me — that's what happens to us...”

I don't remember hearing reveille the morning of our attack. I thought my buddies were all just wide awake already. While my buddies were loading clips of ammunition, I was busy inspecting my own equipment thinking about the night before. We were all told the battle would last only four days — that's what the officers told us. Typically, anyone who wants breakfast can go through the chow line and eat the traditional steak and eggs before loading up. This morning, I do not remember eating breakfast.

We were all ready to go over the side of the ship, climbing down one leg at a time very carefully to the waiting Higgins boat below bouncing around in the heavy surf and banging against the side of the ship. I walked quickly from the berthing compartment through the ship, out onto the deck as if I'd practiced it a thousand times. By the time I climbed down inside the Higgins boat, the first and second assault waves had already been smashing their way through the surf toward the beach. In times like this, you really don't think about where you end up inside the boat. You don't think about location, you just get in. I didn't even notice our big, huge American shells that flew overhead going toward the island. I did notice the Japanese artillery coming toward us as they exploded nearby!

Mt. Suribachi loomed in the distance as my boat got closer to shore. Finally, the soft black sand greeted us as we reached the shore. It was nice to have that softness all around after I jumped in the first foxhole I found! I found the sand to be warm, much warmer than in Kentucky! Even though no one in the boat got sick before

hitting the beach or when the ramp went down, it was nice to get on land. The beach seemed relatively quiet compared to how much the first and second wave Marines must have experienced when they landed! Those first and second waves, boy they sure did their job. The words 'I'm still alive' constantly came into my mind when I stepped off the Higgins boat onto shore. I can't say enough how thankful I was for the softness of the sand because that helped me dig fast and deeper! You know, at some point you have to look out for yourself. You have to do that because if you let something happen to you, then you'd be no good to your buddies or to your unit who depended on you. Once the ramp went down the boat emptied real quick and it was self-preservation at that point, not because we were being selfish, but because we had to remain alive so we could help each other stay alive.

PFC. Faughn has a beautiful approach about himself that is so powerful — a very distinct humility. He continuously stated that he was in the later waves of the attack, and thanks to the first and second waves, the enemy resistance when he went ashore made the battlefield almost quiet, not noisy with the sounds of ferocity such as the Normandy invasion in 1944 in France. Several times throughout the interview he referred to the ugliness, the ferocious fighting the Americans encountered when we attacked the Germans at Normandy. It was as if he believed that his role in the Iwo Jima battle was insignificant, when in fact he took part in the bloodiest and costliest battle the Marines had in the Pacific.

I carried the M1 rifle. That was our standard issue weapon. I also carried from time to time the M1 Carbine and the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). I was in Headquarters and Service Company (H&S). My Marine buddies and I performed various support functions for the maneuvering companies, the actual trigger-pulling Marines who did the killing out in front of us. They wanted to keep us alive — we were Scout Snipers — so we could continue supporting them when we got to the other side of the island. I was very thankful for them advancing in front of us and taking out the Japanese. Although it was slow going, they were methodical and patient to make sure they cleared out bunkers and hiding places. The first casualties that made an impression on me was when I saw many American bodies, I don't remember how many, but it was a lot. They were lined up a few yards from my foxhole. They were covered up with tarps. They were all covered up except for their feet sticking out, some with boots on, some without. They had a note attached to their foot identifying who they were.

PEC. Faughn shrugged his shoulders saying, seeing people not existing anymore, people who were strong, young men and are gone, that leaves you some kind of impression.

One of the greatest impressions I got was at a funeral I attended back home years after the war. I used to direct writing classes in my high school. Teachers and students would write what they wanted to write. One of the things I wrote was what I call 'Rough, Raw, Death'. In this writing, I'm describing and contrasting the war deaths and civilian deaths, and I describe that in a civilian funeral, you see so many dressed up people and you see one dead body most of the time, and the dead body is dressed up as well, and the casket looks so good, and where they dig the funeral plot, they don't let bare dirt just show — they cover it up with green grass. I remember going to the funeral and listening waiting to hear the singers but they hadn't arrived and in reality, I knew they wouldn't arrive, but I thought, you know, this is so different. Sometimes, the funeral is for somebody that was a jovial kind of person, and I've seen people tell jokes about that person at the funeral. One person was preaching at his father in law's funeral, people laughed in church and so on, they were just the kind of people they were. But I heard no jokes of any kind for the dead on Iwo Jima.

I remember when I looked into this long trench that had been dug, and I can't estimate how long it was, it was just a long trench, and I could see these men, some buddies of mine, you could see they were wrapped in Marine Corps blankets. Of course, I could see they were in body bags, then they were put in Marine Corps blankets. I remember walking away that day, and I did some contrasting, I was looking at them, these men — and me — I said to myself so many times that it was so obvious they had given every single thing they had to give. They went to the extreme limits, and here I was, and I thought, well, by contrast I don't fit in with them. That's right, because so far, I'm still alive and so on, so I think it'd be hard not to contrast yourself with the dead bodies that you're seeing, and many of us I'm sure were about the same age. I was just 20 or 21. By contrast, I

hadn't done much for the war. But looking at them, they'd done all they could possibly do for the war. I don't know if they ever contrasted themselves like that or not. I remember contrasting myself at church and getting reactions wherever I was speaking. Rough, Raw Death — I wanted people to see death as I saw it, and I believe they didn't, because in civilian funerals you know, most of the time it's one funeral at the same time, and here I was on Iwo Jima looking at no telling how many — a hundred or more. In a way, I think it's kind of good if you do contrast yourself on some things like that — when they've given everything. I haven't, and I don't mean that my heart was not in the war or anything like that. In actuality, they had given all they could possibly have given, and I'm not saying I'm a slack person or anything like that, but in contrasting, they had done so much, and I had done so little.

"I've learned a whole lot about myself by being in the Marine Corps and I take great pride in saying 'Once a Marine always a Marine.'

Loneliness out on the battlefield is awful. I felt it, but not to the extent that I felt deserted. I felt vulnerable knowing it would not be something out of the ordinary to be killed by the Japanese. I was not exactly in the safest place in the world! One of the feelings I got in the early part of the battle was when it was raining, this was the time when we didn't have any shelter at all. I asked myself where do we go from here? The cold, wind, wet, rain, all contributed to my feeling of hopelessness, vulnerability, fear, as I heard the battles raging in the distance forward of my position. It was cold but the foxholes provided some relief because they were warm. The foxholes were somewhat crumbly to the point that the sand would cave in. 'The best way to fix this was to get empty mortar or artillery shell casings that lay all over and line the inside.

I always knew as many other Marines did, that there was a definite possibility we'd never see our families again. The first night on any battlefield can be the most unnerving, you never know what to expect. On the first night there was nothing but noise! All you hear is explosions, anything that can explode you hear, on the ground, in the sky all night long. I didn't hear a lot of screaming or moaning or yelling, but with the help of flares falling in the dark, I did see people who were in the next foxhole falling silently away from time to time. It's not very easy on the nerves. I often thought to myself 'will the next one be in my foxhole?'

I'm glad I had the chance to be in World War II. I have one gripe though. Sometimes, I run across people, they'll tell their experiences in war and it sounds like they and their buddies practically won the war all by themselves! My family often tells me I don't talk much about the war. I agree.

The line companies had wiped out the Japanese in front of our lines. I saw fellow Marine flamethrowers burning out Japanese from their hiding positions. Well, some people might think this is cruel, but since this is war, well, all is fair in love and war. As much as we value human life, I think this capability was a plus for our side. The battle was expected to last only four days. Then it began taking longer than five, and six and it was into its first full week with no end in sight. You know, anytime we have expected certain things, and they didn't take place, and it goes the reverse of what we're thinking, it tends to get us down. If I'm counting on something big happening in my life and it doesn't happen, that could discourage me and get me down. We have to pick ourselves up and go on with it. I think I held up. You know, life gives you a lemon, you make lemonade. We know that everyday can't be cheery and all that. You know the saying; some rain must come into every life. Some people go to pieces when things don't go how they expected them to, or the way they're told, or they're supposed to. I give myself credit on this. I believe I learned quite well to adjust.

On a more personal level, there are some things about war and battle that are never really known, such as I wore the same clothes every day I was on Iwo Jima. I don't remember ever having a change of clothes. And then, I remember I had a ditty bag with a toothbrush and all those little things and that got away from me. I remember how pleased I was that somebody from the Red Cross gave me the things I was missing later on. You see, when the battle was over Red Cross volunteers were sent to the island to provide health and comfort items until we returned to the ships. I wore those same clothes for thirty-six days straight. I didn't have any change of clothes.

We were told to travel as lightly as we could. Then there was the smell of Iwo Jima. All day and all night there was a lingering powerful smell of explosives all around, and of course, the smell of dead corpses everywhere. I remember observing the cemeteries being put in as we advanced further up north. They did a great job of putting up some sort of memorial pertaining to whatever religion you were in.

There is an aspect about war that is hardly ever talked about, and it needs to be talked about so we can try to avoid the ugliness of it. You see, by this time there is a point where a Marine's mind and spirit latches onto something greater than himself. There is a need for physical survival, but there is also a realization that survival means depending totally on the Marine to your left and to your right especially when you see that the end is almost near. There is also the realization that the Marine to your left and to your right depends on you and you do not want to be the reason that they get killed for not performing your job correctly. I think before that can take place on the battlefield though, it needs to take place back in civilian life. I think parents ought to teach their children those basic things. It'd be good for our teachers to teach students things like that. By nature, would you say we are naturally protectors of others or are we the kind of people who just move on? I think those things need to come on in a person's early life and all through life, like Christian principles, every parent teaching it. If you haven't learned that by the time you get in the Marine Corps, I'm not sure you'll learn it at all, even in the Marine Corps. It's needs to be taught in early childhood. I'd like to feel and believe that this feeling was a part of me all through the battle while on Iwo Jima.

As the battle was nearing its end, we'd get periodic announcements by word of mouth down the line and then at the end, the Army was brought in to replace us on the island. After we reached the north end of the island, we simply made an about face and proceeded back to the starting point where we'd landed 36 days earlier. I don't remember too much about the walk back to the starting point, but I remember being proud about what we'd just accomplished. I didn't leave anything behind on that island. I still had my shovel! Actually, come to think of it, I did leave something behind — my youth.

I don't remember if we rode back to the ship on a Higgins boat or an amphibious tractor. My buddies and I got tired of waiting to get on the boats and we were all pretty much saying let's just jump in the water and swim out to the ships! We were that eager to get off that island! Of course, you can imagine how filthy we all were once we got back on ship. Showers on ship is not something I really looked forward to because of the salt water. Sometimes they'd have a special soap for the salt water and sometimes they didn't. Taking a saltwater shower was not a really happy experience for me!

When I got back home after the war was over, I remember my parents welcomed me as well as I expected they would. They met me in a joyous way and didn't disappoint me. They told me how proud they were of me and reminded me that college was about to start in a very short while. I had to make some decisions about going to college and get busy climbing up the education ladder. I think we both showed our love for each other — mostly they showed me how glad they were I was back.

I have often thought about why did they die and not me, why are they buried and not me? I've thought about them, but they haven't lingered in any great way. I think God has His way of doing things. Why is He letting some people die and others not? And then I kinda' look at it this way, there are different things in the Bible I don't understand, I just can't understand things I read in the Bible, and then I get to thinking, I'm thinking on a worldly plane, and God is acting on a plane much higher than I'm acting on, so surely there'll be many things that I don't understand that God has in the Bible, I know He's far wiser than I, and so, I try to look at it this way, He has greater knowledge than I, that's God's way of doing it, and maybe it's just not His will that I should understand it, and I think well, maybe in heaven I will understand and well, not necessarily. So, I try to get reconciled to the fact that God's way is far better than my way because He's far wiser than I am and so I just kinda let it go. Whether or not I'll ever understand why God let's things happen, and along that line, just like tornadoes, and cyclones, and all those things that happened in Turkey where thousands and thousands of people died from the earthquake, I just can't understand that at all. I can't understand why little babies die.

This is the way I wind up — that's His business, and He's far more capable of running His business than I am of running mine. And so, I have to come to the place that that's the way it's supposed to be. He's doing the calling.

Met the Flag At Iwo Jima

When I was just a lad in school,

I never disobeyed the rule—

To burn the flag

And treat it as a common rag;

I never would have torn it down

Or mocked its meaning over town,

Or spat upon the stripes there

Or wiped my feet on stars fair;

In no way now that I recall

Would I have damaged if at all,

But on the other hand you see—

It meant not very much to me.

I pledged allegiance as the rest

Just idle words from out my chest;

I sang about the "Banner", too,

But never felt constrained to do

A deed to honor those who gave

Their lives the flag to bravely save;

And though its history oft I'd heard,

But then it all did change one day

When I was very far away—.

It happened back in '45

Where some were dead or half alive;

The morning sun was shining bright
Where there had been a bloody fight
Up to the Mount I looked, and there,
A sign of triumph in the air!
Our precious flag was waving high
Announcing victory to the sky
Though I had seen the flag before
And said allegiance times galore,
The flag meant more that morn to me
Because it heralded victory;
It waved a message back and said,
“For me to fly, Your friends are dead.”
And then it all made sense to me—
The flag's the symbol of the free!
That special morn 'on Iwo's isle,
I stood and gazed a long, long while;
My heart leaped up, gone was the sag,
For there I truly met the flag;

In Memoriam

Families may submit notices to director@iwojimaassociation.org.]

Dorsey O'Neal Walker

Corporal, United States Marine Corps

January 1, 1925 – November 3, 2025

4th Marine Division — Saipan, Tinian, Iwo Jima Cpl Walker, of Angelina County, Texas, served with the 4th Marine Division in the Pacific. He fought at Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. On Iwo Jima, from 19 February to 16 March 1945, he served as a radio operator with a rifle company, often at a forward observation post or on reconnaissance with his company commander and carried out his duties under mortar and small-arms fire. He was later recognized as one of the last surviving veterans of the battle. After the war he remained active with the VFW and local veterans' groups. Graveside military honors were rendered at Brown Cemetery.

Iwo Jima Association of America Legacy Project

The Iwo Jima Legacy Project honors and preserves the legacy of those who served at the Battle of Iwo Jima. As the generation that fought on Iwo To grows smaller, the Association's charge is simple and urgent: gather the record while it can still be verified, and place it where families, students, and the public can find it. The Legacy Project is that work. It is not a substitute for reunion or for standing on the black sand. It is the means by which those gatherings outlast the men who first made them necessary. The project will:

1. Collect and store verified public service records, personal histories, photographs, and oral histories of Iwo Jima veterans.
2. Provide a searchable, mobile-responsive public portal for researchers, family members, and the general public.
3. Provide a publicly available interface for submission of profiles, historical documents, photos, and data.

IJAA welcomes participation. Search for a name or a relative, then add or update biographies, photographs, and stories. A directory of Iwo Jima veterans is maintained on the project site, including a section devoted to the Medal of Honor recipients of the battle.

Fewer than 200 Iwo Jima veterans remain. The Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, also uses gifts to help those men reach the Anniversary Reunion in Arlington and the Reunion of Honor on Iwo Jima — travel, lodging, meals, and, when needed, travel nurses. Sponsorship of a veteran is one direct way to keep faith with the living while the archive is built for those who will come after.

How to take part

Visit the Legacy Project: <https://iwojimaassociation.org/legacy>

Project page: <https://iwojimaassociation.org/iwo-jima-association-of-america-legacy-project/>

Donate or sponsor a veteran: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/donation-form/sponsor-and-honor-an-iwo-vet>

How to Reach IJAA

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Uncommon Valor Was a Common Virtue.