IWO JIMA ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
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# 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: Royal F. Earle
- In Memoriam
- Educational Outreach
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### Save These Dates

[18-21 Feb, 2027] — 82nd Anniversary Reunion: 2027 Anniversary Reunion & Symposium

*Arlington, Virginia*

[24-29 March 2027] — Iwo Jima 82nd Anniversary Reunion of Honor

*Iwo To (Iwo Jima), Japan*

Details and registration:
iwojimaassociation.org

# Feature — Heros Among Us, Reconstructed Narrative

*By Royal F Earle*

Royal F. Earle was born in Bloomfield, New Jersey – suburb of Newark, Earle enlisted in the United States Marine Corps on November 10th, 1942, after graduating from high school. He became a field telephone and wire switchboard operator assigned to Third Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. Earle's previous battles included Kwajalein, Marshal Island and Roi Namur.











I was aboard ship when they told us where we were going – just before we were to land on Iwo Jima. They never told us where we were going ahead of time. It was a couple of days before. The officers had a layout of the island for us to see. Our unit leaders never described the Japanese to us. To us a Jap was a Jap, no matter where he was. To us, the invasion was going to be just another landing, we never knew how significant it would turn out to be. I had been in three previous Marine landings, and this was just another one. Me and a few other Marines were more seasoned than the new Marines. We knew what to expect, but not how bad it would be. I had too many things on my mind to think about family. I was going to be a very busy man out there. I had to think about where we were going to land, the equipment I had to set up, and to make sure the units were able to talk to each other. I had a lot to think about.

After I went over the side of the ship into the Higgins boat, the boat driver detached from the ship, he circled the ship several times until there was a certain number of boats to begin assaulting the beach in waves. When the correct number of boats formed up, the first boat would get a command to peel off, the other boats would follow that lead and head towards the beach. The boat drivers would know it was time to head toward the shore because all the boats had signal flags. When the drivers of each boat saw the lead boat drop their flag downward, they knew to line up and head toward the beach with their cargo of infantry Marines.

The Marines rode in the boat toward the beach with their heads down. I was on the fourth wave going in. There were five minutes between waves. The first wave landed at nine o'clock. By the fourth wave, it was only nine-fifteen. They landed and got out of there. Five minutes later the second wave was on its way in. When the coxswain and the boat ramp operator got to the sand, the ramp went down, and the Marines all ran out to the beach. When the last man got off the boat, the boat driver got the heck off the beach because he didn't want to get blown up! The Marines that got off the boat with me, we'd been a team before so we all knew each other. None of us were really nervous or scared, we were just resigned to where we were, and what we had to do once

we hit that sand. We were all set to go. My unit was a communications outfit. I was on the fourth wave, the first three waves had nothing to do with setting up field phone communications, that responsibility lay with the fourth wave. I had the switchboard all by myself. It was about seventy-five pounds. It had handles on each end, I'm a little guy, and so I bent over to pick it up and run, and my knees kept hitting it. Would you believe that I stopped right there in the sand, and I raised it above my head on top of my helmet and ran the rest of the way. I ran onto Iwo Jima with the switchboard on my head! Can you imagine the target that I was? (Figure 31)



Figure 31. USMC switchboard in battle

There were five levels of sand on that beach. At the second level there was a big shell hole. It must have been from one our big ships guns from when they were shelling the island. I told my other switchboard operator "Hey, this is the place. Let's go!" We jumped in and got to the front of the shell hole and set the switchboard in. My partner jumped in the back and got all the insulators in. The wiremen had their drums of wire and began shouting out wire letter designators such as the first one "K", meaning that wire for the switchboard was going out to "K" Company which was one of the infantry companies already ahead of us destroying the Japanese. That wireman gave the wire line to my partner Eric who then connected it to the switchboard. Eric scrunched the wire and the wireman would get out of the hole. Eric stripped the wire about an inch from the end. There were five steel wires, and three or four copper wires within the comm wire. He pulled the steel wires away from the copper wires, and then twisted the copper wires tightly. Before Eric stuck the copper wire into the switchboard receptacle, he wrapped the wire around a metal or wooden stake, stuck the stake into the ground, and then inserted the wire into the switchboard. He did this so in case someone caught their foot in the wire after it was strung across the battlefield, the wire would not be disengaged from the switchboard. (Figure 32)

This process was repeated for each of the companies out forward of us. That's what we did – we established phone and switchboard communication for the guys doing the fighting. We didn't just keep the units out front talking to each other, we also connected the switchboard to the cargo ships behind us on the beach. When the companies forward of us needed supplies or weapons or ammunition, we'd call the supply guys and they'd get the word to the cargo masters on the ships.

We knew how many units we were responsible for based on the organizational board we had. We began testing our hookups. The wireman had his headset on, he'd say for example "K", for "K" Company. When I heard "K" Company respond back that they'd heard the test, I'd flip up the lever on my console to indicate that communications were established with that infantry company. When my board was done with all companies' levers activated, Eric placed a protective plate in the back of the console that prevented the wires from being disconnected from their hook-up points.

Our job was so technical, so important to the infantry Marines pushing forward of us. I never even bothered to lay eyes on Mount Suribachi. At least I don't remember looking at it. My guys and I were always focused on looking downward. From the moment we got off the boat, running onto the beach and looking for a place to set in, and then finding a place and then focusing on setting up the equipment, I didn't have a second to look anywhere else. Not only that, but the 4th Marine Division was not concerned with Suribachi. That was another divisions area of responsibility. Suribachi was responsible for Suribachi, they were on our left on the beach. They had three combat regiments – the 26th, 27th, and 28th Marine Regiments. The 28th was charged with taking the mountain. The 27th went in after the 28th. The 27th shot across the island. What they did was cut the mountain off from the rest of the Japanese on the island. We hadn't known about the tunnel system yet. We

didn't figure that out until later in the battle. The 26th Marines went in and maneuvered around the base of the island and contacted us so they'd link up with us. We were on their right flank.



The Japanese had us in their sights as we were coming ashore. They were buried in their caves, in their tunnels, they had pillboxes all over that island and were firing down on us. We lost a lot of our guys when we came ashore. They were looking down our throats and firing at us from small slits in the pillboxes. We still had a long way to go up the terraces even as we received fire from all over the place. We were getting bogged down but we knew we had to set up comm because the first, second, and third waves did not have anything to do with setting up communications. Their job was to fight the Japanese and clear their routes for the rest of the units coming on shore. Surprisingly, despite all the shelling by the Japanese within our sector, the wiring we had laid out from the switchboard out to the companies did not get destroyed. Within my sector, field phone communication was intact! I knew this because continuously throughout the battle, we'd conduct comm checks every fifteen minutes with the companies. We didn't use a challenge and password system as typically is done over the radio. The way we'd communicate a test over the phone line was we'd blow a short breath into the handset. The company radio telephone operator would blow back gently indicating acknowledgement and that all is well. All I cared about was my switchboard and making sure communications kept working. I was not concerned with looking around the battlefield and seeing what was going on. My eyes were always focused downward no matter what.

Eventually the tanks came ashore. We hated those tanks, but fortunately we were not near their lanes. Then the trucks came in delivering supplies to the companies, and when we saw them come back to the beach, we'd know they survived their landing. I had noon to midnight shift – we worked twelve-hour shifts. The first night we tried to relax a little bit after working all day to establish comm. At night one of our technicians hollered out "K" is out! This meant that the tech was running wire out to the company. We had learned at Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and the others that the Japs love to come over at night. We'd send twenty guys out at night and the Japs would shoot them! So, we started sending out other guys with them and they'd ride "shotgun" for them. Their sole focus was keeping the wireman alive so that he was not concerned with anything else, just that wire. These Marines were from the line companies, not from our H&S Company. The wireman would head out toward the line company, they'd crouch down and hold the wire through their finger, they'd move forward and follow the wire in the direction of the company, and as long as they felt it nice and taut, they knew the wire was still intact. When either I or one of my other wiremen went out, the Marine protecting us would follow a few steps behind sweeping the area to our front checking for Japs. Before even leaving your area, you better know your password. The Marines up front had a bad habit of yelling out "Halt! Who's there?", and they'd shoot if you hesitated. The Marine "riding shotgun" would take extra wire with him so in case they find a break in the wire, they can splice the wire back up. The companies had drums of wire with them as they moved forward, whenever they were able to move forward. We stayed stationary, we did not move forward.

The battle was expected to last for four days. For days on end as the battle progressed, my guys did their job. If they didn't need to be outside on the battlefield, they didn't go. If you were not outside checking wire you were inside the hootch watching. One night it was my turn to go out and check the wire. I had on all my tools and

then looked up and said “Ok, who’s riding shotgun?” Everyone was looking around because many of them had been out earlier. I asked “who’s gonna go with me?” and “Who hasn’t been out?’ It was the lieutenant! So they all looked at him. he said “ok, yeah I know it’s my turn, I’ll go! What do I need?’ I told him to take extra wire, keep your eyes open and keep that gun cocked.’ He followed me out, I instructed the lieutenant that we’d go out, I’ll follow the wire, and he’ll cover me. It’s 2:00 AM and pitch black! I’m out there, running around, trying to feel around for the wire, Finally, after crawling forever with my rifle on my back, and my bag on my hands and knees, we get to the break. I told the lieutenant to give me the end of the wire. I did the repair and I run out of wire. When I heard back that comm was reestablished, I said “good!”. We didn’t talk very much, so we had to be creative with how we communicated. I turned back around. I didn’t know exactly where the lieutenant was right away, but I saw the light bounce off the water and I was able to see him. I’d forgotten a tool and I told him. Now, he didn’t have to do it, but he volunteered to go back and get it! There was a flash! I didn’t hear anything, I figured it was all over. I checked my hands and feet, arms and hands to make sure I wasn’t hit. I got back up and I swear I heard people laughing. I looked out ahead and saw a wall of guys laughing and they were laughing at me! I had been right under a 105 inch howitzer and they had just fired a round. What I heard was the sound of the blast right over my head! I just crawled over and they said we were watching you the whole time, no one was going to bother you while you were working! I said “Why didn’t you tell me?”. One of the guys said “How?” The other guy said “Didn’t you hear us open the breech?” I said “No!” He said, “Didn’t you hear us put the shell in?” I said “No!” “You didn’t hear us slam the breech shut?” I said “No!” He said “You didn’t hear us yell fire?” I said “No, but I heard it go off!” They laughed and laughed and I crawled back away out of there!

The crazy thing is I never felt alone, like I was by myself anywhere. My buddies were with me, my lieutenant was with me going out there to run wire, and even when I was under that artillery piece, I was not alone. We all felt vulnerable because of the conditions we were in – a battlefield! I was not concerned whether or not I was going to be hit. I was not concerned with what was happening around me. I was only concerned about whether my operation was working, whether I was doing my job right. After the lieutenant and I finished our work, we were able to relax because we had done our job. Nothing else happened that night with us. Even during these relatively quiet times in between jobs, you don’t have time to think about what’s going to happen in the future, you just think about the job at hand. You don’t even have time to think whether you’ll ever see your family again – you’re just too busy doing your job.

In the beginning of our operation, we had an “O” Line, the location on the island where we needed to be by a certain time or day. When the line companies got to that point, they didn’t need us anymore, because they had set up their own telephone capabilities, and ran their own lines. We were set up to just get them started. What we did then was gather all our equipment – the wire, the switchboard, all of our stuff – and move out. We didn’t know where, just wherever we were needed. We were made available to any unit that had their wire personnel killed or wounded, we’d go in to replace or reinforce them. The First Battalion, 25th Regiment lost a wireman, so we were called to replace them.

Now that the 5th Division secured the mountain, the 4th Division isolated the mountain from the rest of the island, and then we began turning right at the airfield to go after the rest of the island. The 27th Regiment was waiting for us to catch up to them as we pivoted right. Now, my little reserve wire unit moved forward as the line companies moved forward so we could keep reinforcing them as needed. Our original gear was kept back in the rear at the beaches. That gear was only for establishing comm in the beginning. We used whatever gear was used by the units we reinforced. When we were not needed, we did not commit our wiremen to infantry duties. We could not have our wiremen engaged in combat as a rifleman and then not be able to go reinforce a unit while they’re busy fighting the battle. When they were not fully engaged, they were constantly checking wires and comm in their area.

As the end of the battle began taking shape, depleted units merged with units that were almost fully functional. Equipment and supplies began being returned to the starting point on the beaches. My unit’s responsibilities were not in demand as they had been earlier in the battle. We were called now to reinforce supply and logistics teams to load and move supplies. There was a certain amount of relief that we were done, and we were preparing to move out. But that was just our area. The rest of the island was not declared secure yet, as there

were still individual units still fighting off Japanese hold outs. After all the units had finished their battles, then the Army came in to occupy the island, but they would not come in until we declared Iwo Jima secured. However, after we had loaded back up on the ships, we didn't leave right away. We stuck around for a little while in case the Japanese counterattacked from an unknown place.

After the war, I returned home to a lovely family and my lovely girlfriend. I remember walking with her after all the parties and dinners. My parents notified her parents and it was a warm and happy homecoming. Also, because we all had been through so much, members of the 4th Marine Division formed an association. We formed chapters throughout the country and in most every state. We advertised and we got 22 Marines who'd served and who lived from central Maine all the way down to Jersey – we were Chapter 21.



Figure References in Original Text

Figure 31. USMC switchboard in battle (https://www.redcom.com/code-of-honor-navajo-code-talkers-on-iwo-jima/)

Figure 32. A unit commander calls the switchboard. The Marine operating the switchboard answers. The commander gives the name of the unit he wants to speak with, and the Marine operator plugs a patch cord into that unit's socket on the switchboard connecting the two.

## In Memoriam

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

## Educational Outreach

Iwo Jima Association of America (IJAA) Outreach Program

IJAA is pleased to advise of our Outreach Program developed to ensure the history of the Battles for Iwo Jima and the Pacific Islands are never forgotten. We submit that the history of the causes for World War II in the Pacific are fading in today's educational system. The lessons of history must not be forgotten at the expense of repeating the costly errors of economic and cultural, but more important, patriotic sacrifice of our most valued youth. Fanaticism, greed for power, theocratic and cultist fervor from the past are never dormant as can be seen in today's world. History is, indeed, repeating itself in hotspots around the world and we must know our history so that the bloody campaigns do not repeat themselves.

IJAA is pleased to make available a historical presentation to your civic, military, patriotic, educational, social or neighborhood organization. For further information, please contact:

Director@iwojimaassociation.org. or call text: (703)212 8128/(703) 963 6895.

## 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.*