



OBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Iwo Jima, California Wildfires & the M69

Part One: Strategy

The battle for Iwo Jima will be remembered next month, as it is every year, so it seemed like a good time to open some books and remind ourselves of that history. Unexpectedly, the California Wildfire broke out that same day. These two events, Iwo Jima and the California Wildfire, while separated by thousands of miles and 80 years of time, happen to share a peculiar connection with one another.

Since the California Wildfire is constantly in the news it's not necessary to repeat the details of that story. We all know strong winds blew embers that ignited the dry vegetation.



The spreading flames engulfed many structures.



The fire spread throughout some neighborhoods and left every house in ruin. It is truly an painful tragedy.



On the other hand, this coming February 19th we will pause to recognize the 1945 invasion of Iwo Jima. This year marks its 80th anniversary. That confrontation with Japanese defenders turned out to be the most hazardous battle in the history of the Marine Corps. More Marines were wounded and killed on that battlefield than at any other time in their history.



The haunting link between Iwo Jima and California's Wildfires requires some history to understand.

Prior to the war Iwo Jima was inhabited by poor Japanese fishermen. Later the Japanese government recognized its strategic location and constructed an airfield. Several fighter aircraft were kept there, ready to defend against any invaders.



Iwo Jima

Boeing began designing a long distance, high altitude airplane in 1938 called the B-29. Army generals wanted a plane that could fly 400 MPH, strike targets 2,000 miles away and carry 20,000 pounds of bombs. By 1945 this enormous airplane, nicknamed "*Superfortress*" was being manufactured.



B29 assembly line in a Boeing factory; c.1945

Tinian Island, located 1500 miles from Japan, was selected as America's base of operations. Hundreds of B29's were brought there and made ready for the upcoming assault. Only Iwo Jima stood in the way.

The battle over control of Iwo Jima began on February 19th and ended in the final days of March. With this victory America had total control of the skies and could now move forward with their plans to send bombers over Japan's mainland.



B29 attack squadrons

Their objective was to bomb the Japanese factories that manufactured weapons for their army and destroy the dry-docks that constructed ships for their navy. Unfortunately, dropping bombs from high altitude had never been done before. The sighting of the target was extremely complicated and the falling bombs often drifted sideways due to strong crosswinds. After several bombing missions an appraisal revealed disappointing results; only 14% of the bombs hit within a quarter mile of the intended target.



The Army Air Corps changed their strategy. They flew closer to the targets for greater accuracy, however at the lower altitude the Japanese anti-aircraft guns shot the planes full of holes.

This had become a dilemma.

America had hundreds of B-29s on site and ready to fly; Japan had no remaining aircraft to defend themselves. The situation was perfect. Unfortunately, bombing Japan's industrial centers was proving to be much more difficult than expected.

The Army Air Corps needed a new strategy.

Coming next
Part Two: **Fire**