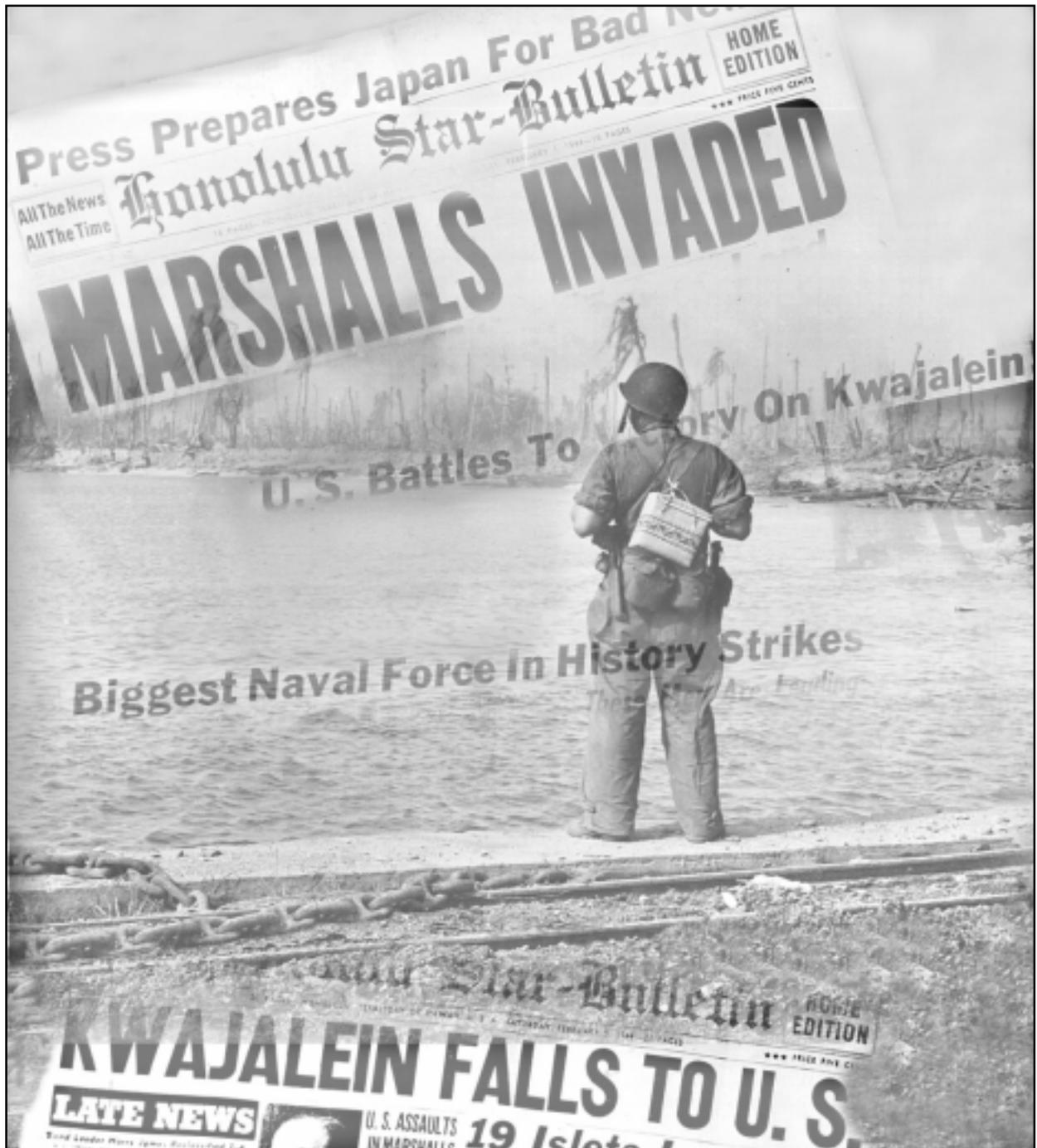


Battlefield Images



A special publication by
The Kwajalein Hourglass
in honor of those who served
in the 1944 invasions of Kwajalein Atoll,
55 years later, Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 1999

In Honor of Veterans

Landing at Bucholz Army Airfield in 1999, one scarcely notices the marks of a historic battle here 55 years ago. A few battle markers and worn-down bunkers are about all that physically stand to remind us that before Kwajalein was a world-class missile range with a global mission and all the comforts of small-town America, it was a Japanese base with a strategic mission during World War II.

Operation Flintlock changed that. From Jan. 30 to Feb. 5, 1944, the atoll was a battlefield, where U.S. troops stormed beaches and fought their way through bomb- and shell-ravaged jungle and bunkers.

Today, the island little resembles its war days. The U.S. has added entire sections of land along Lagoon Road and north of Bunker Hill, for example. Trees have grown up where the terrain once appeared as a moonscape from the battle damage. And entire complexes of buildings and huge sensors have been built.

Since the war, *The Kwajalein Hourglass* has been here collecting stories and photos, marking the passage of time. That has given us an opportunity to view images seen by few, except

perhaps archivists at the Smithsonian Institution or U.S. military museums. Over the years, as photos from the battles at Kwajalein Atoll have surfaced, people have trusted the *Hourglass* with their keeping. Many have run in battle anniversary stories, but many more photos have remained in boxes, with no room to run in the paper.

landed on Roi-Namur. Zurick's son, Pat, currently works on Kwajalein, and brought the photos to the *Hourglass*' attention.

The collection depicts men in combat. But it depicts more than that. One can open up any number of books at any library and see combat photos. These are pictures of men who fought — some lived,



Titled "Expression" by an unknown photographer, the picture of these soldiers tells a story shared by veterans worldwide.

(U.S. Army photo)

Recently, the photos were joined by photographs taken by WWII combat photographer Marine Sgt. Andrew Zurick, who was attached to the 4th Marine Division, which

some died — on the ground where we work, play and live.

And what better way to honor veterans than to remember them in photographs taken by veterans.

Cover art: An unknown soldier of the 7th Infantry Division stands on what appears to be Nob (now Echo) Pier, surveying damage from the battle of Kwajalein Island. On his back is a Marshallese-woven bag.

(U.S. Army photo)

Hitting the Beaches

When soldiers and Marines hit the beaches, they were backed by a massive naval and air bombardment designed to knock out Japanese fortifications.

Near Roi and Namur, Navy ships laid a non-stop barrage of 2,655 tons of ammunition.

A regiment of 75 mm and 105 mm howitzers bombarded the islands from five nearby islands.

Marines hit the beaches at 11 a.m. and faced relatively light resistance on Roi, but stronger defenses on Namur.

Meanwhile, near Kwajalein, Navy ships fired 7,000 shells into Kwajalein's defenses on the morning of Feb. 1, alone, not counting the heavy bombardment days before the attack. Navy aircraft flew 96 sorties over Kwajalein before H-Hour.

Forty-eight 105 mm howitzers, along with several 155 mm howitzers, bombarded Kwajalein from nearby Carlson Island, sending over 29,000 shells.



Men of the 7th Infantry Division head to Kwajalein (in background) aboard landing craft at 9:30 a.m. on Feb. 1, 1944.

(U.S. Army photo)

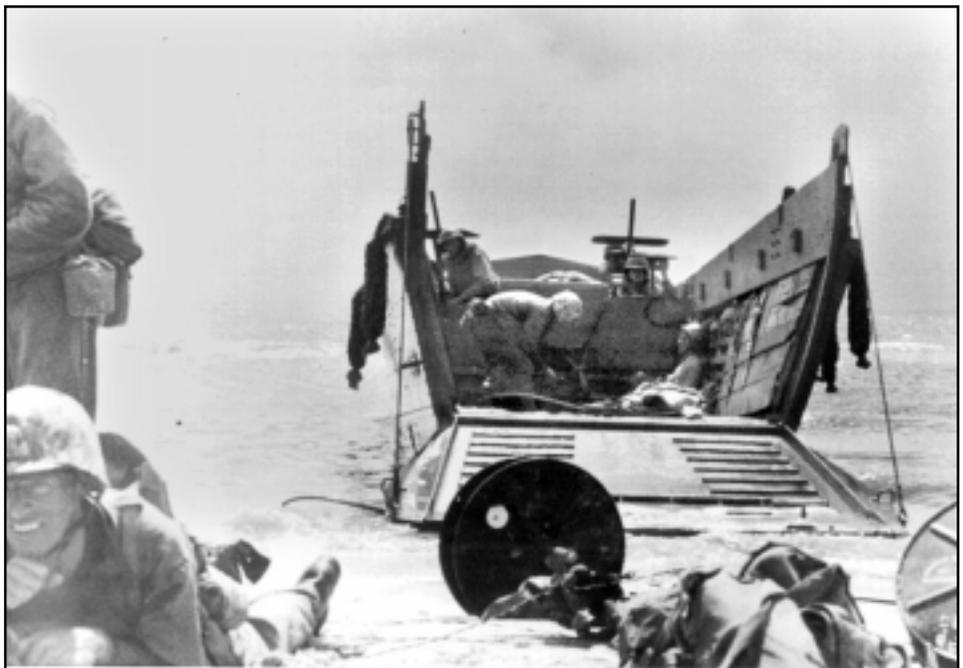
Within 12 minutes, 1,200 men landed on the west end of Kwajalein without a casualty. Units advanced 1,800 yards up the island before

the end of the day, losing only 17 dead and 46 wounded, while killing 500 Japanese and capturing 11 more.



Marines hit the beaches of Roi and Namur islands, Feb. 1, 1944.

(Andrew Zurick photo)



Wounded Marines are loaded into a Higgins Boat on the beach. Marines captured Roi quickly but faced stiffer resistance on Namur.

(Andrew Zurick photo)

On-island combat



Soldiers with the 7th Infantry Division use a flame thrower on a Japanese position on Kwajalein. The unidentified photographer titled this photo, "Hot Spot." Most soldiers carried rifles with bayonets and grenades, but tough defense positions often called for satchel charges and other explosives, or flame throwers, when available.

(U.S. Army photo)



Soldiers take cover from enemy fire. The smoke became so thick at times, troops as near as 10 yards couldn't see each other. One observer described the action as "trying to fight one's way across the landscape of a nightmare."

(U.S. Army photo)

As U.S. troops advanced up the island of Kwajalein they faced stiffer resistance. The surviving Japanese had recovered from the heavy bombardments and began to organize a defense along the front lines.

The Japanese, furthermore, conducted late night banzai counterattacks. Individual defenders tried to infiltrate the lines.

The fighting over the next three days quickly deteriorated into small unit actions, as American squads and teams fought snipers as well as heavily defended bunkers and buildings.

As troops neared what is now "downtown," they faced a whole complex of Japanese buildings, each fiercely defended.

On day three, shortly after sunset, Japanese charged American lines near what is now 6th Street.

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The attackers were cut down to the last man.

By the fourth day, troops advancing oceanside reached Bunker Hill, which was the end of the island at the time. At that point, organized resistance ceased, and a day of mop-up operations began.

Roi fell quickly, but the Japanese had well prepared Namur for attack. The action was further complicated as Marines mistakenly destroyed a blockhouse used as a storage building filled with torpedo warheads and aerial bombs. The explosion killed Japanese and Americans alike and filled the sky with a towering, thick black smoke. The Marines' 2nd Battalion suffered more than half of its total casualties in the single explosion.

Four Marines earned Medals of Honor in the 24 hours of fighting on the two islands.



A soldier calls out from a forward command post on Kwajalein. The use of Navy and Army artillery support, along with aircraft from nearby carriers, proved effective against the Japanese.

(U.S. Army photo)



Two soldiers take a moment out from battle to play cards, while other soldiers survey the scene.

(U.S. Army photo)



Howitzers on Carlson Island supported U.S. troops on Kwajalein.

(U.S. Army photo)

The Wounded



(Andrew Zurick photo)



(U.S. Army photo)

Above: Soldiers at an aid station care for wounded on Kwajalein. Left: A Marine corpsman treats a wounded Marine officer on Roi-Namur.

On Kwajalein Island, 845 Americans were wounded in action.

The wounded were, when possible, evacuated to the rear of the lines, and then many were transported to Navy ships offshore and in the lagoon.

The troops took the greatest number of casualties on the second and third days after the invasion — 244 and 255 wounded,

respectively — as they encountered stiff resistance in bunkers and heavily defended buildings.

Marines on Roi and Namur islands recorded 547 wounded in the 24 hours of action.

One Marine, Pfc. Richard Sorenson, received wounds and

earned a Medal of Honor when he dove atop a grenade to save his comrades. He survived, the only Medal of Honor recipient in the battle to do so.



Marines give a Marshallese woman water at an aid station after the battles on Roi and Namur islands.

(Andrew Zurick photo)



Soldiers of the 7th Infantry carry a wounded comrade on a stretcher through the desolate Kwajalein terrain.

(U.S. Army photo)

The Fallen

In the whole campaign for Kwajalein Atoll, U.S. forces lost less than 1 percent of their forces in casualties, a marvel of military history.

In real numbers, however, 1 percent still translates into men killed in action.

On Kwajalein, the 7th Infantry Division lost 142 dead and two missing in action. The enemy, estimates say, lost 4,938 dead with 206 more taken prisoner, including 127 Koreans.

On Roi and Namur islands, 190 Marines died. The enemy lost 3,472 dead along with 51 prisoners of war and 40 Korean laborers.

Of the Marines killed, three received Medals of Honor, including 1st Lt. John V. Power, Pfc. Richard B. Anderson and Lt. Col. Aquilla “Jimmie” Dyess. Both Power and Dyess were killed leading attacks on enemy positions, while Anderson threw himself on a grenade to save the lives of his comrades.



Above, right and below right: Marines gather at a burial service for fallen comrades shortly after the battles of Roi and Namur islands.

(Andrew Zurick photos)



One of the last casualties of the battle for Namur Island, Lt. Col. Aquilla “Jimmie” Dyess was killed Feb. 1 by machine gun fire while leading an attack on a holdout bunker. Dyess received a Medal of Honor—one of four awarded at Roi and Namur—for his actions and was the highest ranking officer to lose his life in the battles for the atoll. This photograph, taken shortly before the landings, was the last ever taken of Dyess.

(Andrew Zurick photo)

Victory



(Andrew Zurick photo)



(U.S. Army photo)

Above and left: Marines and soldiers collect a number of souvenirs, including samurai swords, rifles, uniform pieces and flags.

Below: Roi and Namur were devastated by the bombardments and subsequent fighting.



The victory at Kwajalein Atoll could hardly have been more complete. The American victory marked the first time U.S. troops had taken pre-war Japanese territory, and it established another key American base in the Central Pacific.

This presence helped lead to the isolation of the Bismarks, Solomons and New Guinea. Furthermore, many Japanese positions were bypassed as a result of the success at Kwajalein Atoll, allowing U.S. forces to concentrate on other targets including the successful assaults on the Philippines and Marianas.

The battles proved true lessons learned in the Tarawa Invasion, and those lessons would become a part of U.S. amphibious landing operations in the years to come.



(Andrew Zurick photo)

Want to learn more about the battle for Kwajalein Atoll?

Check out these selections available at the Grace Sherwood Library:

The Kwajalein Hourglass, Feb. 5, 1994, Vol. 34, No. 10 (50th Anniversary edition)

The U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific, Seizure of the Gilberts and the Marshalls by Philip A. Crowl and Edmund G. Love
History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. VII, Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls

by Samuel Eliot Morrison

Battlefield Images is a special publication produced by the staff of *The Kwajalein Hourglass*.

Photos prepared by Dan Adler. Text compiled by Jim Bennett