

## WORLD WAR II

**Biography**

As their strategy of island hopping brought Allied troops closer to the Japanese mainland, the small island of Iwo Jima was to become a valuable stronghold from which aircraft could take off and make emergency landings. Winning the island was a bitter struggle.

◆ *As you read, think about the sacrifices made by the marines who fought at Iwo Jima. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**The Marines at Iwo Jima**

As approximately 70,000 United States troops prepared for an invasion of the Japanese-controlled island of Iwo Jima, a force of more than 20,000 Japanese soldiers had entrenched themselves in the island's mountains and built tunnels throughout the island. As a result, when the first U.S. troops began to land on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, they encountered strong resistance from the Japanese. Defending themselves against enemy fire proved difficult as they stormed the island from the sea.

However, in the coming days marines began to make progress in their efforts to win the island. By February 23, they had captured Mount Suribachi, a tall volcanic mountain that provided a strategic defensive location for Japanese troops. Photographer Joseph Rosenthal took the famous picture of six American soldiers raising the United States flag at the top of Mount Suribachi. This photograph has come to represent the heroism of the soldiers who fought at Iwo Jima. After more than a month of fighting, the United States won the battle for the island.



*Iwo Jima flag raising.* © CORBIS

The victory came at a significant cost. Approximately 6,000 were killed in the battle, while more than 20,000 were injured. The battle for Iwo Jima became one of the most costly battles of the war for the United States. About one-third of all marines that lost their lives during World War II did so at Iwo Jima. Such significant loss of American lives at Iwo Jima and in other similar battles in the Pacific contributed to the later decision to use the atomic bomb rather than launch an invasion of mainland Japan.

Despite the costliness of the fighting at Iwo Jima, the victory did prove to be a significant one for American forces. The subsequent use of the island for carrying out air attacks against Japan, as well as for landing damaged planes returning from such attacks, proved especially valuable. The victory also provided a rallying point for the American public. Chester Nimitz, commander of the United States Navy in the Pacific said of the soldiers, "Among the men who fought on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue."

**Questions to Think About**

1. Why was it difficult for American forces to defend themselves against Japanese fire?
2. What event did Joseph Rosenthal capture in his famous photograph?
3. **Summarize** Why was Iwo Jima an important strategic location for the United States campaign in the Pacific?