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Iwo Jima

Part 2: The battle for coordination

by Mr. Steven D. McCloud

LtGen Lawrence F. Snowden (1921–2017), who commanded a Fox Company, 2/23 Mar at Iwo Jima in 1945, used to say that battles were ultimately won by infantry going ashore, planting the flag, and proclaiming, *We're in charge*. On 19 February 1945, Capt Snowden's rifle company did just that at Iwo Jima. As one of the assault companies, Fox Company landed at 0905. By 0920, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/23 claimed over 10 acres of Japanese homeland territory. The Japanese, in effect, responded: *Welcome ashore. We'll see how badly you want it.*

Once the initial waves of Americans were ashore and filtering through the largely vacant lower terraces, the Japanese opened a gradual crescendo of direct and indirect fire that swelled through the morning. During the height of its intensity through several midday hours, the Marine landing force was effectively held in place by machinegun fire and volcanic grit while pummeled by rockets, artillery, coastal defense guns, and heavy mortars. The assault turned to chaos. For the surviving Marines of Snowden's company, it was an eight-hour nightmare—an isolated, individual odyssey to churn forward and upward through a 730-yard-deep target zone.

Easy Company's Sgt Bernie Conrad was to Fox Company's left. "About half way, or maybe three-quarters the way to the airfield," he explained, "I had two guys from Easy Company, three guys from Fox Company, and three guys from maybe one of the other battalions."¹

After 15 minutes ashore, Capt Snowden's company was pinned in place some 200 yards inland. To his left, Maj Lester Fought's Easy Company was in the same predicament. Both men

called for tanks. Maj Robert H. Davidson, BLT 2/23's commanding officer, made the call to the regimental commander, Col Walter Wensinger. It was time to get the fighting team together. Three minutes later, the colonel replied that the tanks were on the way. It was 0930.



LtGen Lawrence F. Snowden (1921–2017), commander Fox Co., 2/23 at Iwo Jima. (Photo provided by author.)

Snowden and his runner, FM1c Eddie Davis, glanced back to check the progress of the Landing Ships, Medium (LSM) bringing the tanks to the beach. They knew the Marines aboard. They

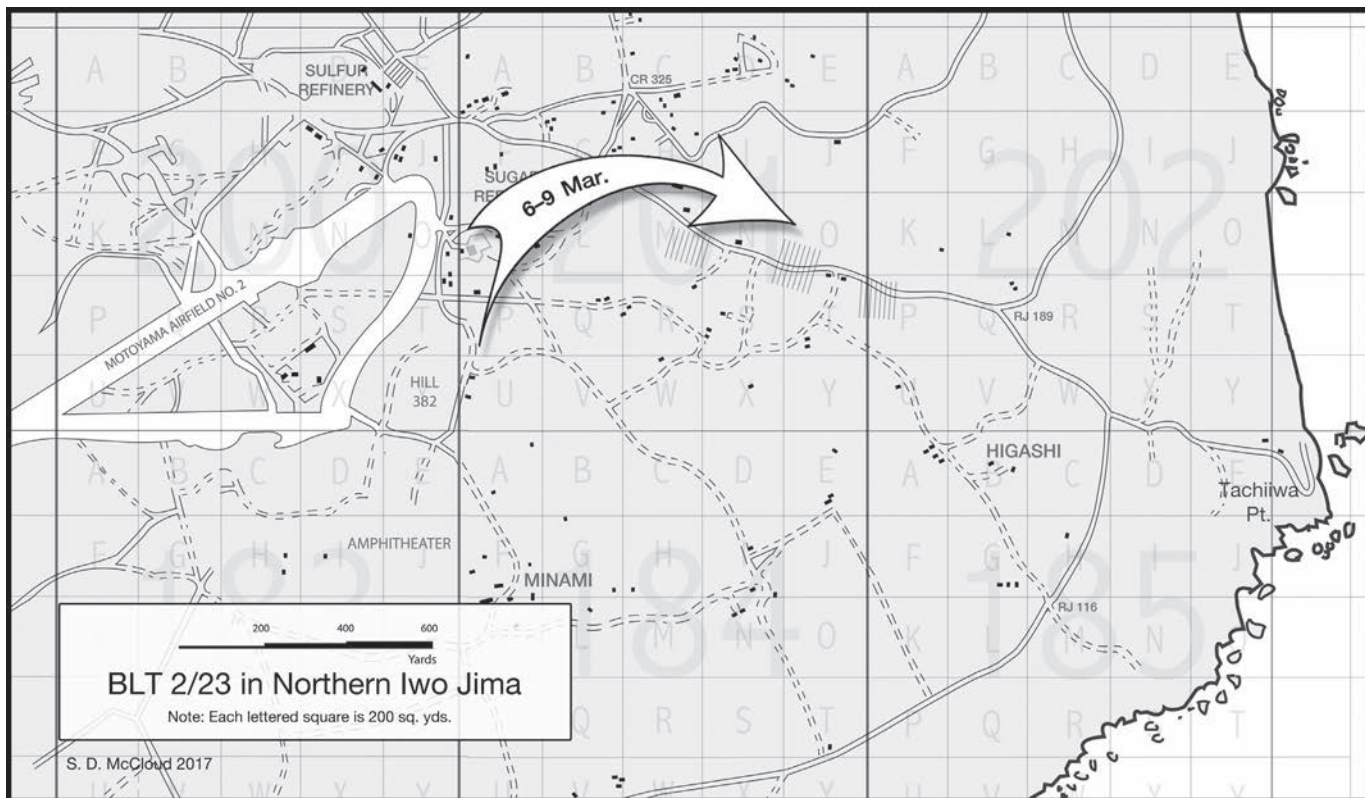
were Maj Bob Neiman's men of C Company, 4th Tank Battalion. Headed straight toward them was Lt Charles Haber's LSM-216, carrying Neiman and six of his tanks. Davis could see splashes of mortar rounds chasing the vessel as it neared the beach. After ten grueling minutes, Davis watched Neiman's command tank, "Ill Wind," ease down the ramp, leading his company into the fight. Then it met with Iwo Jima.

"It turned toward the right and bogged down in the sand ten feet from the bow," wrote Lt Haber. Neiman and his men struggled to free the tank but eventually had to leave it abandoned on the beach.²

Meanwhile, the Marines of 2/23 Mar inched forward individually, hoping their fellow Marine tankers would reach them. But while the small vessel was ashore, Marine casualties had come aboard, and Haber had to take them out to LST-930(H), the evacuation control ship on station off YELLOW II. Snowden and Davis watched the LSM back off the beach and turn away with the tanks they so badly needed. "We felt pretty naked at that point," said Davis later.³

Rocket-firing Marine Corsairs hammered distant large caliber weapons with good effect. But the only hope for close support for the riflemen was Lt Henry "Buck" Finney's 81mm mortar platoon. Those Marines were ashore

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Map of Northern Iwo Jima attack by BLT 2/23, 6 March 1945. Based on Marine Corps map. (Illustrated by Steven D. McCloud.)

and in action early, searching for targets along a trench line at the base of the enemy airfield. Finney moved up to call fire for his platoon. By early afternoon, the Japanese had destroyed two of his mortars and killed his executive officer and several other Marines. Finney had hoped to get the battalion's brand-new rocket jeep into the fight. It never fired a shot before the Japanese knocked it out. The floating dump carrying his six 60mm mortars and ammunition was destroyed, and Iwo's hammering surf clawed a third of his mortar ammunition back into the sea. All four of the regiment's 37mm guns were knocked out.

Meanwhile Haber and Neiman had not given up. Four hours passed while they struggled to reach Snowden's Marines, but they could not find a suitable beach over which to land the tanks. "By then my sense of frustration had exceeded all known bounds," said Neiman later. "I really had no idea how to get ashore in such a way that our tanks could maneuver off the beach and come to the aid of the infantry, who

were clearly getting the brunt of the fire now, and perform our mission."²⁴

Neiman's team finally located a spot near YELLOW I, near where his other tanks had come ashore from LSM-126, two of which had promptly been disabled by mines. But Neiman's tanks would never reach the Marine of BLT 2/23 on D-Day.

The fighting team was undone from the moment it hit Iwo Jima and simply could not get together. The enemy—both the Japanese and the island of Iwo Jima—was winning the battle for coordination. For eight hours the Marines churned upward. Of those who finally reached the airfield, few saw any familiar faces. Units were in disarray. They had no supporting weapons to speak of, no cover, and few weapons. Machinegunners found themselves with a weapon with no tripod and vice versa.

They were alone and they had little doubt they were going to die that night.

Northern Iwo Jima 6–9 March (Regimental Combat Team 23)

After two weeks of battle, 6 March

was to open the concerted island-wide drive to break through the enemy final defensive belt. Across the island, 5 March was designated for rest and reorganization. Not so, however, for the engineers and tankers. They were in the north doing battle for coordination. For the 4th MarDiv, the main effort was to be made by Walt Wensinger's 23rd Mar. With his 1st and 3rd Battalions largely spent, his main effort would be made by Maj Bob Davidson's BLT 2/23, with Maj Shelton Scales's 3rd Battalion in support.

In preparation for the push, Wensinger's engineers and tankers were trying to change the situation to the team's advantage, trying to breach an entrance into the enemy stronghold so that the tank-infantry team could get together and take it to the enemy as one. They worked on four roadways—partially improved trails that were the only possible tank approaches into the terrain ahead. The roads and any open ground around them were infested with horned mines and covered by fire from concealed fortifications, all designed specifically to

keep the Marine tank-infantry team from forming.

In the days ahead, northern Iwo Jima would prove an exceptional test for the Marines. The narrow and open southern part of the island had been a veritable target zone for Japanese weapons. Across the waist of the island, the defensive belt had featured interlocking fields of enemy fire across broad open areas. Northern Iwo Jima, however, was characterized by impassable terrain thick with hives of enemy traps.

The book *Black Dragon* describes the terrain:

All three Marine divisions were still attacking in a northeasterly direction, along the island's spine. Iwo Jima's ragged and corrugated terrain, however, ran perpendicular to their line of advance, with fissures running like jagged and broken troughs from the high ground at the island's center, down and outward toward the sea, which, in the case of the 4th Division, was to their right. This presented a great many tactical problems as the Marines attacked against the grain, confronted with one frontal assault after another against, over, and through these ridges and cross-compartments. Once the high ground was seized, they could swing rightward and attack down those corridors, with the grain.⁵

Here, Iwo Jima's rocky terrain would take its turn at the Marine teams. Massive earthen jumbles of moon rocks the size of small houses were flanked on either side by more open areas littered with boulders, debris, and minefields. One rifle company would dissolve into a rocky labyrinth while an adjacent company would be left in open fields of enemy fire without cover or concealment. They were going to need the support of their tanks.

6 March: The Big Push

The attack of 6 March began with every ounce of preparatory fire that could be provided from corps level, namely twelve battalions of artillery and naval gunfire followed by the hasty barrage of division-level rockets. By and large, that was as much as they could do. Maj Davidson's BLT 2/23 headed outward. On the right, Capt Larry Snowden's Fox

Company filtered into a rocky maze as thin strings of squads and snaked slowly through the crags and boulders where tanks could not follow. From that point forward, the Americans' battle for coordination was waged most distinctly at two levels: BLT and rifle squad. This was the case largely because the Japanese had their own plan to win that battle for coordination.

Working as one with the terrain, the Japanese successfully separated rifle squads from regimental or battalion assets, enacting a methodology char-

Even the battalion's 81mm mortars were of little support.

acterized by Col Wensinger as "mouse-trapping." The Japanese had placed their mortars and rockets in draws and cross-compartments where no American supporting fire could reach them and no spotter plane could see them. Even the battalion's 81mm mortars were of little support. Only small groups of riflemen could work into the disorienting maze to locate the source of the fire. The Japanese would then spring

the trap, pin the Marines in place with sniper and machinegun fire, and then rain mortars onto them. The Marines had seen no such coordination from the Japanese in the Central Pacific.

The unit to Wensinger's right, BLT 2/24, experienced the same effect,

The enemy's use of automatic weapons to pin advancing infantry down and then pound them with big mortars was remarkably well coordinated. In most instances, the Japanese forces had observation for this mortar fire. When they appeared to lack observation, they had their own forward units fire air bursts with light mortars. These air bursts gave off a very heavy greenish smoke. The big mortars would then register in on the air bursts.⁶

In more open terrain, anywhere it might be possible for Marine BLT assets (tanks and infantry) to get together, the Japanese used rock barriers to channel the tanks into minefields often sighted by highly effective 47mm anti-tank guns. Should the American tank-infantry team threaten to take form, the Japanese responded.

To Wensinger's left, BLT 3/21 (3rd Marine Division) wrote, "Only one tank at a time could be employed in this terrain. The enemy destroyed one of our tanks by firing air bursts over the tank to disperse the infantry, and



Terrain in 4thMarDiv zone. Looking across a corridor to a rocky mass typical of northern Iwo in March 1945. (Photo by Sgt Joseph Glozak.)

covering by smoke the approach to the tank of a demolition detachment which knocked out the tank with a demolition charge and a Molotov cocktail.”⁷

On the far side of the island, the 5th MarDiv improvised a method of moving forward using armored bulldozers to plow a pathway. These then moved aside so tanks could lead a push, followed by infantry and engineers.

In the 4th MarDiv zone, infantry had no choice but to press the attack alone. On the far right, RCT 25 was the hinge on which the division swung rightward. They reported no success getting the tanks and infantry together. On their left, RCT 24’s efforts were frustrated as well. “Tank-Infantry coordination in the attack did not exist,” they wrote, “because at no time would the terrain allow tanks to move forward with infantry. Usually, two or three tanks supported each BLT by fire from the best positions available, as close to the front lines as possible.”⁸

The Japanese not only leveraged terrain to physically keep the Marine team from working as one but also attacked the will of the infantry squads to do so. Whereas on Saipan and Tinian, the presence of tanks had been a source of comfort to the Marines in the rifle units, this was not the case on Iwo Jima, as Maj Irving Schechter, S-3 for BLT 1/24, explained:

Psychologically, tanks had an opposite effect on the riflemen than they had on previous operations, due to the fact that they always drew heavy fire when on or near the front lines or when in our zone of action. The men were not anxious to see tanks coming up to help.⁹

At the BLT level, the Marines did not give up trying to get their strength into the fight. With BLT 2/23 making the main effort on the division left, the most treasured piece of technology in that battle for coordination was the dozer tank. It proved the primary mechanism for defeating natural and enemy barriers, clearing the path not simply to reach the enemy but to get the team together. Unfortunately, each tank company had landed with only one of the dozers, and two of them had already been knocked out. No sooner had Maj Bob Neiman’s



Marine dozer tank pushes through Iwo Jima’s rocky terrain to reach the infantry in March 1945. (Photo by Dreyfuss.)

men of C Company tanks made some gains with BLT 2/23 before their last dozer tank was lost to a mine. Neiman borrowed one from the 5th MarDiv and kept grinding away, resolved to do anything to reach the infantry squads with that combined capability.

... the most treasured piece of technology ... was the dozer tank.

Coordination is difficult: “Due to the rugged terrain encountered on Iwo, orthodox infantry-tank tactics had to be abandoned,” reported the 4th Tank Battalion. “Tank tactics were improvised, and in many cases, basic principles of employment were disregarded. This was never done because of ignorance of fundamentals; it was done because the tactical situations warranted certain calculated risks. Tank units were eager to support the infantry, and they did everything physically and mechanically possible to furnish that support. If it is certain that tank support of infantry and vice versa was less on Iwo than in

previous operations, it is equally certain that the terrain encountered made this situation a foregone conclusion. Errors were made by tank units and by the infantry units they were supporting, but these errors were realized at the time, and corrective measures were immediately initiated. Some tactical errors were easily traceable to the loss of so many key personnel in both the RCTs and the tank battalion.¹⁰

The Battle for Coordination in the Rifle Squads

In the rock jungle of northern Iwo Jima, just as in the gritty mire of D-Day, those rifle squads could not wait around for tanks but rather had to press the attack alone, as dictated by the enemy.

In Fox Company, BLT 2/23, Sgt Sam Haddad was one of the monuments of leadership. He had been platoon guide in 2ndLt Fred Kraus’s 3rd Platoon. Around midday on 6 March, when the 2nd Platoon’s 2ndLt Kyle N. Drake was killed by a sniper, Capt Snowden radioed Lt Kraus to send Haddad to the 2nd Platoon. Only when he arrived did he learn why he was there, and only with a radio call back to the command post did he learn that he was now in command. It fell to him to extricate

the platoon from the mousetrap. Using cover of smoke, he did so, including the wounded.

“The general policy that officers must be assigned to jobs in battle according to TO designation was not adhered to,” wrote Maj Bob Davidson. “For example, that a company commander must be a captain, a platoon leader must be a second lieutenant. This is poor policy; for in battle, it is not the rank that counts, it is the man for the job.”¹¹

Haddad would receive his commission formally once he returned to Maui and would go on to represent two U.S. presidents in international labor relations. He discussed the facts of life in northern Iwo Jima:

On Saipan and Tinian, you could control a unit; you could control a squad. But on Iwo Jima, it was not a matter of control; it was a matter of, everybody knew where they had to go. You didn't have control of a unit. You couldn't control a unit. That sort of thing just wasn't possible. I might not even know what a small group of Marines just a few feet away was doing. We didn't have the flat spaces that would accommodate a whole squad. We didn't have that in other battles. We didn't have it on Saipan, where you would have a whole squad, or sometimes a whole platoon could react. On Tinian, we had flat fields and we would work together, and you knew where everybody was. This battle, Iwo Jima, we just didn't know.¹²

In terrain where Marines could see no further than one or two others, there were no contiguous lines and no orderly maneuver. Haddad was firm in his assessment that, on Iwo Jima, any effort by leaders to control was not only folly but deadly. Leaders had to rely instead upon mission orders to generate coordinated action free of management, the combination of coordination and resolve, strategic leadership, and personal leadership.

Then, onto these veteran NCOs who were fighting the battle for coordination, the Marine Corps dumped a new source of chaos in the form of combat replacements. These partially trained Marines were not fed into the lines as trained fighting units with all the con-

fidence and technique that might bring to the fight. Instead, they were plugged into decimated units as alphabetical individuals. New Marines trained only in 81mm mortars were handed a rifle and expected to function as part of a rifle squad amidst the chaos. They looked around at grizzled Marines they did not know—combat veterans who did not know them. BLT 3/23 had received such 157 replacements on 24 February. The next day, they were thrown into the assault on Hill 382.



2dLt Samuel Haddad (1921–2002), Fox Co. 2/23. The “Gentle Giant” platoon sergeant, took command of the 2nd Platoon under fire on 6 March 1945. Haddad was one of the veterans of the Marianas operations who held things together and kept things moving in the terrain of northern Iwo Jima.
(Photo provided by author.)

If 30 days had not been enough time back on Maui to properly train the Thanksgiving replacements, then this situation was unfathomable. These replacements, without the benefit of implicit understanding and experience, required more explicit guidance and controls—more mother-hen individual management—and a greater heft of personal leadership than the experienced Marines. “I told these replacements to stay put until I came and got them,” explained Sgt Robert Verna, of G Company, BLT 2/25, “and I would place

them where I wanted them, trying to keep them from getting killed.”¹³

NCOs responsible for generating action on Iwo Jima had thus suffered a tremendous blow in their battle for coordination.

Maj Bob Davidson’s assessment illustrated the effect on those NCOs and their ability to lead:

Inexperienced and untrained troops in combat impose a severe handicap on the small unit commanders. The untrained man in combat labors under the added burden of not knowing what to do at the proper time for his own protection or for the safety of his fellow combatants ...They were not familiar with the organization and did not know either the officers or the men of the unit to which assigned; they were reluctant to take the initiative in battle and each man had to be told individually what his particular job would be in each phase of the attack. As a result, the more seasoned and experienced troops were forced to expose themselves dangerously in order to get the replacements to move. This unfortunately resulted in the loss of many extremely valuable officers and men.¹⁴

“They knew all the Marine moves,” explained Sam Haddad. “But we didn’t know ... could I leave that guy alone and know that, as a Marine and with the training and all of that, he’s gonna do the right thing. When you work with somebody all during training like on Maui, you get to know a person. Some of these people, we didn’t even get to know their names before they were killed.”

BLT 1/9 reported receiving just over 200 new Marines from its assigned replacement draft:

a very large majority of whom were nothing more than recruits, and we had very many unfortunate experiences with them. They cannot be expected to fill in the ranks when none of them knew how to operate a flame thrower, a bazooka, or how to set off a pole charge, and many did not know how to operate a BAR, much less a machine gun or mortar. Non-commissioned officer replacements were mainly experienced only as drill in-

structors; occasionally one was found who had had previous field work.¹⁵

In northern Iwo Jima, NCOs could hardly lead the team for having to manage individuals. On 6 March alone, of the 41 recorded casualties suffered by Fox Company, BLT 2/23, 21 (50 percent) were NCOs, three more than on D-Day. Most were hit by shrapnel. These young combat veterans were above ground trying to create action, preserve coordination, or manage inexperienced replacements.

Leaders like Haddad had no choice in this terrain but to lean on mission-oriented coordination, and to build the resolve necessary to fight for it. On the spot, personal leadership had to make strategic leadership work in the rocks of northern Iwo Jima.

When you dig in at the end of the day,” explained Haddad, “that’s when you check with your people and see if anybody is injured and has to go back, or maybe would not be feeling well, to assure them that, this was the line, dig in, we can’t get out of the hole tonight, and all of these things. And you find out how well they are that night. And then you talk about tomorrow’s objective and things like that. When you have these replacements, you have to do more than you normally would do. When it got dusk, I would be sure that I talked with these guys, and see how they were doing and how they felt, and just to reassure them that, we’re all here. We’re all here together, and there are certain things that we have to do.”

Winning the battle for coordination on Iwo Jima was difficult. The few remaining leaders at the platoon level like Haddad were fighting to win.

LtGen Lawrence F. Snowden remembered this phase for his rifle company:

These young Marines, despite the casualties we suffered today, knew that tomorrow we’re going to do the same thing all over again. When the sun went down, we tried to count our casualties and see who’s left, and what are we going to need to carry on tomorrow. They knew what was going to happen tomorrow; they were going to continue to butt their heads against that stone wall of resolve on the Japanese side. But they did it anyway. They

didn’t hesitate. They knew that’s what we were there for. They knew what the objectives were, and they carried on with the mindset of, ‘let’s gain the objective and get out of here.’”¹⁶

7 March

The enemy stronghold in the rocky morass was displaced in the morning attack. Col Walt Wensinger and Maj Bob Davidson saw an opportunity for maneuver, using the depleted rifle companies of Maj Shelton Scales’s 3rd Battalion to plug resulting gaps.

To the regiment’s left, 9th Mar had launched a pre-dawn attack and surged well ahead—to the point of being isolated. Davidson used E and K Companies to resume direct pressure on the rocky labyrinth dead ahead. Additionally, since G Company, to their left, was operating in more open terrain, he had them press the attack toward the 9th Mar without regard to maintaining contact on the right. Snowden’s Fox Company then swung around to the right through the resulting gap and

prepared to fill gaps and ‘tie in’ on short notice facilitated this procedure greatly. Units in the line operating at reduced strength found it difficult and often impossible to fill in gaps when they could barely cover the frontage in the assigned zone of action.”

Making the Right Thing Happen

Late that afternoon, elements of Fox Company had wedged into the next rocky jungle, a convoluted ridge forming the wall between two broad corridors heading toward the sea. One of Bob Neiman’s Marine tanks had worked its way to its base; Marine tankers were present with their fellow Marines carrying rifles. Atop the rocks, only a single rifleman could glimpse the enemy. The 3rd Platoon’s PFC Joe Colson had climbed to a tenuous perch to peer down into a rock hollow. Only he could see Japanese soldiers scurrying to and from their embedded position. It was their first advantage over the enemy since setting foot on Iwo Jima.

The single tank hammered rounds

... all six rifle companies of the two battalions would be used interchangeably as a single battalion to generate the effect of maneuver and concentrate force ...

hit the enemy position from the flank. The rocky cluster was overrun by 0930. Over the next two days, all six rifle companies of the two battalions would be used interchangeably as a single battalion to generate the effect of maneuver and concentrate force where needed. “Physical contact with adjacent units is not always necessary in daylight operations,” wrote Davidson. “Willingness to disengage flank contact to take immediate advantage of opportunities to advance proved almost invariably to be the only means of taking ground during this operation.”¹⁷

“Tying in,” Davidson added, “and filling gaps between adjacent units will continue to be a delicate and hazardous maneuver. The assignment to troops from reserve elements of the responsibility of reconnaissance of the area

into the face of the rock, flushing enemy soldiers out the back side and into the open for Colson. The rifleman put fire on them as rapidly as he could while his fellow Marines passed up loaded weapons from below. They burned through enough ammunition that the platoon radio operator called the company command post for help and FM1c Ed Davis made three trips through machinegun fire to reach them with bandoliers of ammunition.

In the late afternoon of 7 March, as the remainder of the BLT was called back for the night, a single tanker, a stand of loaders, and a company runner supporting a single trigger puller coordinated to seize the opportunity. Together, the ad hoc team represented the main effort for BLT 2/23, RCT 23, and the 4th MarDiv. There was nothing

orthodox about it. They were working as one to make the right thing happen the right way, at the right time. This was tank-infantry coordination on Iwo Jima.

8 March

It was on the morning of 8 March when, at last, BLT 2/23 could make the turn and the division could push down the long rocky corridor, attacking with the grain of Iwo's terrain toward Tachiiwa Point.

The morning began with three of Bob Neiman's tankers, commanded by Lt Max English and including the dozer tank which Neiman borrowed from the 5th MarDiv. They were pushing down the corridor with Fox Company, now led by its executive officer, Capt Charles J. Ahern. Finally, the BLT and the company-level fight began to merge into a singularity.

Neiman had been busy. He had found a dozer tank and gotten a platoon of tanks up to Fox Company. The BLT had done all it could and had reached the infantry units with that capability. But it was still only capability. Out in the open, the tanks were made "radio-active" by enemy mortar fire, and the riflemen stayed clear.

Capt Ahern prudently tried working with the tanks from a safe distance via the SCR-300 radio. In his own estimation, the results still were not all they should have been. The tanks were physically present. Thanks to technology, Ahern could communicate clearly with Lt Max English via radio and nominally the tanks and infantry were operating together. But as close as they were, as hard as they tried, they were still two teams trying to cooperate. They did not yet have a single shared view of the target. They were not yet working as one. There was still a gap, and only Ahern could close it.

Davidson, Neiman, and the others had done what they could do from the BLT level. Now Ahern at the company level did what he could do. In effect, he displayed uncommon resolve and said, "damn the torpedoes," and ran through the mortars to the phone attached to the rear of the tank. He ran into enemy fire to truly unify the tank-infantry team.

Now they were in business.

Now that the battle for coordination had been won, armed with a single shared view of the target, the tank-infantry team now worked effectively as one.

They worked through a mortar barrage for over an hour, knocking out numerous enemy positions and pushing steadily down the corridor until Ahern

***There was still a gap,
and only Ahern could
close it.***

was finally hit by shrapnel. When he was evacuated, the team pressed the attack until only one tank remained, itself ultimately barred by yet another minefield from proceeding with the riflemen. But together they had pushed some 1,000 yards down the corridor. The pressed Japanese finally came out from their hidden positions and launched their counterattack that night against BLT 2/23.

Conclusion

In 1945, ADM Chester W. Nimitz famously said, "Among those who

fought on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." The admiral was, of course, correct. But it was uncommon resolve that won the battle—an uncommon resolve to work as one, to win as one.

The fight on Iwo Jima was a battle for coordination. The Marines ultimately prevailed in that battle. The outcome was victory in the battle for Iwo Jima.

Organizations of any type, in any scenario, must recognize that, if they are to achieve anything approaching coordinated results on the outside, they must first achieve the state of coordination on the inside. Unfortunately, in human organizations the natural state is not one of coordination, it is chaos—defined as anything less than coordinated action, true singularity of effort, working as one to win as one. Chaos is on the attack at all times and has a familiar ally called friction. It can only be overcome with great effort and relentless leadership. Coordination is difficult. The battle for coordination must be fought and won first.

Until a single shared view is achieved of the target or objective, a single shared definition of what a win looks like, no organization large or small, military or civilian, can truly work as one. Every organization, at every second of the day, must share a clear single answer to the



Capt Ahern, Executive Officer, Fox Co, 2/23, standing left with hands on hips, in the BLT 2/23 command post on the morning of 6 March 1945. (Photo by SSGt Bob Cooke.)

question, *what specifically are we supposed to achieve together?* Winning the war is not it. Making money is not it. Those do nothing to provide coordination to a team in motion. As we see in Capt Ahern's example in the Tachiiwa corridor, even close proximity of teammates or assets does not guarantee coordination if that single view of the target is not achieved and preserved.

The Marines had worked on their A-game and brought it to Iwo Jima. They knew what right looked like, and it looked like the combined assault capability of their tank-infantry team. From the minute they set foot on that island, they were embroiled in a month-long struggle to get that team together and into the fight. They fought with absolutely nothing working to their advantage, and never could they

They rested too heavily on presumptions of inter-Service coordination and still implicitly viewed *team* as functional cooperation. Everyone would do their jobs, and all would work according to plan. It took the training and combat experience throughout that year for them to figure out what *team* and real coordination looked like. And they not only learned how to fight as a team but how to fight for the ability to do so. It paid off in the rocky labyrinth of Northern Iwo Jima.

When the enemy dismantles our coordination plan, what is our recovery plan? We must recognize that there is a battle for coordination underway and that it must be won internally before we can hope to win any other battle externally. What is our battle plan to win it? It requires the intentional mechanisms

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bring the team together as envisioned. But they resolved to leverage anything that contributed to the team's ability to work as one and were equally resolved to expel anything that did not, namely procedures, rules, assumptions, and notions of control. And fortunately, they had implements to help them not merely fire, move, and communicate, but to fight for their capability to do so as one.

On Iwo Jima, the unlikely example of superior technology was probably the dozer tank, of all things. It represented not merely the means to reach the enemy with force but a mechanism with which to reset as a team and set things to rights and to get the team back together. High-performance teams not only resist forces that threaten to tear them apart but establish mechanisms with which to recover, to re-establish the state of coordination.

The 4th MarDiv and indeed the V Amphibious Corps of early 1944 would not likely have prevailed at Iwo Jima.

to fight it, and the resolved coordination to win it. Without these, there can be no coordinated action; there can be no team.

Iwo Jima was the test of those things that mattered most. The Marines showed they were up to the task. And that is why Iwo Jima was placed, by them, on the top pedestal of achievement for the Marine Corps. That is the message they want to broadcast to the Marine Corps of the future.

Notes

1. Interview between author and Bernie R. Conrad and January 26, 2002.
2. LSM 216 Action Report, Period 22 January–21 February 1945.
3. Interview between author and Edwin Davis in September 1999.

4. Robert M. Neiman and Kenneth W. Estes, *Tanks on the Beaches*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press; 2003).

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