

## Iwo Jima

Foster Doyle Mitchell of Seneca was an engineering major and a member of Clemson's Class of 1944. He was assigned as a cadet private to Company H, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment. He attended Clemson for a year and a half before enlisting in the Marine Corps in January 1942, mid-way through his sophomore year.



After completing boot camp, Mitchell was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. The regiment was initially formed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, but once it was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, it relocated to Camp Pendleton in California. Ordered to the Pacific Theater in January 1944, the 25<sup>th</sup> Marines participated in the battle for Kwajalein and the Mariannas campaign, but its greatest challenge would come on a volcanic island in the central Pacific.

D-Day on Iwo Jima was February 19, 1945. American strategists planned to seize the island to deny the Japanese the use of its airfields. Army Air Force B-29 bombers had begun flying long-range missions from bases in the Marianna Islands and the Japanese radar and fighters based on Iwo Jima were a hindrance. The plan was to land two Marine divisions, the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup>, and compel the Japanese defenders of the island to capitulate. Things didn't go according to plan.



The 25<sup>th</sup> Marines landed on Blue Beach 1 with two battalions. Their mission was to swing to the northeast and take control of the island's quarry. Despite an advantage in nearly every category of fire power, the Marines, attacking from the sea and over open beaches, were at a disadvantage. The Japanese had built miles of fortified tunnels into the island's ridges and rugged terrain. From their sheltered positions, the Japanese, with no realistic means of resupply

and no hope for final victory, inflicted heavy casualties on the Marines. The 25<sup>th</sup> Marines'

3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, landed 900 men that morning on Blue 1 Beach. By nightfall, only 150 were still in fighting condition. Aboard his command ship, Marine General Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith, commander of the ground forces, briefed war correspondents. "I don't know who he is," Smith reported, "but the Japanese general running this show is one smart bastard."

Rather than engage in large scale attacks, the Japanese held back inside their rugged fortifications and required the Marines to root them out. It was a strategy designed not so much to secure an unachievable victory, but to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy. It worked. On the seventh day of the operation, the 25<sup>th</sup> Marines attacked with three battalions abreast. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division's daily summary, "Progress was slow and difficult along the entire front because of the extremely difficult terrain and stiff enemy resistance employing small arms, machine guns, and mortars fired from well prepared and camouflaged positions." The regiment advanced on the right by about 75 yards, but Corporal Mitchell was killed in action.

Iwo Jima, which was supposed to have been conquered within a week, was not declared "secure" until March 16. Even then, combat operations continued until March 25. Iwo Jima was unique among the Marines' World War II battles. It was the only one in which American casualties (dead and wounded) exceeded those of the Japanese. Even so, Japanese combat deaths were three times as high as Americans killed in action since few Japanese were willing to surrender and their wounded could not be evacuated.

Foster Doyle Mitchell was survived by his four brothers. He was awarded the Purple Heart and in 1948 was reinterred at the Welcome Baptist Church Cemetery in Seneca.

