

A Sulfurous Hell

reviewed by Andrew Lubin

Perhaps no battle in American history is as well known as Iwo Jima, with the resulting stories of courage and bravery generating hundreds of books describing the battle from a variety of viewpoints. Despite this surplus of reading material, *From the Volcano to the Gorge* should be added to your reading list. Instead of the usual chronological format, the publisher took the first-person accounts of two Marines, strangers to each other, but both having landed the first day and fighting less than a mile from each other, and let them tell their own stories their own way.

Coauthor Howard McLaughlin, Jr.'s story comes first. A 19-year-old heavy equipment mechanic with 5th Division's Engineer Battalion Headquarters and Supply Company, McLaughlin expected to be landed on Iwo a few days after the first wave, if indeed landed at all. McLaughlin is a gifted writer, and one of the few able to accurately portray the carnage and confusion of a battlefield. He describes watching the waves of amtracs streaming toward the island that morning while listening to the command radio frequency being broadcast on the ship's loudspeaker system and soon realizing that no one was moving inland and that most of the Marines were within the first hundred yards of the beach and being cut to ribbons by the accurate Japanese fires. Then it's time for him to board his LCVP and hit the beach:

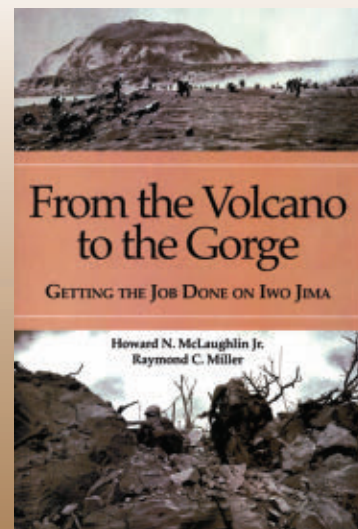
In those exhilarating first few seconds, with the adrenalin really flowing, suddenly the realization that you were in danger was brought home to you. You were in combat.

>Mr. Lubin is a distinguished author and journalist. He is the author of *Charlie Battery: A Marine Artillery Battery in Iraq* (L&R Publishing, 2004).

People were trying to kill you . . . the first few steps out of the boat were on packed wet sand, easy to run on. Then came dry sand that was almost impossible to run with all the weight we were carrying. The shock waves from exploding shells . . . when I reached the sandbank I got a closer look at the masses of Marines huddled in shell holes. There were wounded waiting to be taken off the island. All around were dead Marines wrapped in their ponchos, piled up as 'sandbags' to protect the wounded from the blizzard of shrapnel.

Not needed as a mechanic, McLaughlin was switched to machinegunner. Fighting the entire length of the island, he watched the first flag raised on Mt. Suribachi and eventually participated in the final fight at the gorge. Writing with an understated style that serves to reinforce the intensity of the fighting, McLaughlin's story puts the reader hunkered down next to him watching Marine flamethrowing teams attacking Japanese pillboxes and caves.

Coauthor Raymond Miller's story takes a different tone. Instead of concentrating on his time on Iwo Jima, Miller offers a series of vignettes that range from boot camp to participating in the forces occupying Japan after the war; his is the more biographical story. A member of Company H, 3d Battalion, 28th Marines, 5th Mar Div, Miller was the company's armorer and landed as part of the 18th wave on the



FROM THE VOLCANO TO THE GORGE: Getting the Job Done on Iwo Jima. By Howard N. McLaughlin, Jr. and Raymond C. Miller. Tower Publishing, Standish, ME, 2011
ISBN 9780982795545, 330 pp.
\$16.95 (Member \$15.26)

first day. His is the more typical "what and where" recap so commonly written by veterans and far less personal than McLaughlin's. But occasionally he reveals how the battle affects him still today as he writes:

There was a sight as sharp in my mind today as it was 60 years ago: one of our Marines was still there half-kneeling with right arm raised to throw a grenade. He was frozen there by a Jap flamethrower, skin blackened, burnt to a crisp, with a scream of pain you could almost hear, still on his scorched face. You don't ever forget things like that.

Both authors are effective in thrusting the reader into the action as they provide a view of Iwo Jima that is raw and rare in the telling. *From the Volcano to the Gorge* is a valuable addition to your bookshelf as it describes both the courage of Marines in combat and a ground-eye view of the battle for Iwo Jima.

