

## IWO JIMA: TASK INSTRUCTIONS

**The key question:** Why was the battle for Iwo Jima so important to America?

**Your task:** You work as a tour guide in the park where the US Marine Corps Memorial is situated. Decide how you would explain the memorial and its history to visitors.

Click on the **starter source** for more details then open the source box.

Download a PDF of this whole investigation.

## PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA

### WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?

For many Americans, Joe Rosenthal's photograph showing the raising of the American flag on the island of Iwo Jima is highly significant. There are several reasons for this:

- It is such a powerful and dramatic image
- It is a statement of loyalty to the US – after such a hard battle US troops still had the strength to raise the flag
- The image, and the men in it, was used in a publicity campaign to get Americans to buy war bonds (funds for the war effort) – this made millions aware of the image and the story behind it
- Each side in this battle fought bravely
- It was the first time Allied forces landed on Japanese home territory (rather than lands Japan had invaded)

Casualties in the battle were enormous, which may have contributed to the decision to use the Atom Bomb.

---

### Your task

You work as a tour guide in the park where the US Marine Corps Memorial is situated. Decide how you would explain the memorial and its history to visitors. This could be in the form of:

- A talk
- A presentation
- A written text or pamphlet
- A video
- Your own ideas

---

**PHOTOGRAPH OF US MARINES RAISING THE AMERICAN FLAG ON THE  
ISLAND OF IWO JIMA IN 1945**

Catalogue ref: EMP.2372506



---

### What is this source?

This source is a photograph taken by American press photographer Joe Rosenthal on 23rd February 1945, on the fourth day of battle. The US Marines were planting the American flag on Mount Suribachi, the highest point on the island of Iwo Jima.

The photograph is the model for the [US Marines memorial statue](#) at Arlington, Virginia and is said to be one of the most reproduced images of all time.

---

### What's the background to this source?

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945 US forces reached the first of the islands that made up Japan's homeland, Iwo Jima.

The attack began on February 19th 1945. The Japanese plan was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. The troops and their commander knew their role was to delay the Americans while their comrades prepared to defend the rest of Japan. It was effectively a suicide mission. Iwo Jima was heavily defended by over 20 000 troops with plenty of artillery and other equipment. They were dug into a system of caves and bunkers. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28 000 (with over 8000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21 000 dead out of a force of 22 000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide.

---

### **It's worth knowing that...**

This photograph made the men in it into household names. The U.S. Postal Service even put the photo on a US postage stamp. The men were brought home and toured the USA to raise money for the war effort by urging Americans to buy war bonds. In 2006 the famous Hollywood director Clint Eastwood made a film called *Flags of Our Fathers* that told their story.

Most people know that the photograph was actually the second raising of the flag. A smaller flag had been put up a few hours earlier. When Rosenthal reached the summit of the mountain he found a group of men raising a second larger flag. It was the raising of this flag that Rosenthal photographed. He won a Pulitzer Prize for the photo. Some people have suggested that the composition of the photo is so dramatic that Rosenthal must have posed the marines. Rosenthal has always denied this to be the case.

---

### **How will you use this source?**

1. Describe this image as though you were a radio broadcaster. What details would you describe to your listeners?
2. The Pulitzer Committee awarding Rosenthal's prize described the photo as showing a "frozen flash of history." What do you think they meant?
3. Why do you think the US government used this image to convince Americans to buy war bonds?
4. This photograph was not the first raising of the flag. Does that matter?
5. Is there any information from these notes that you could use in your presentation?

**PACIFIC 1939-1945: IWO JIMA**

**WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?**

**Extracts from a report comparing the Allied campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, June 1945**

Catalogue ref: WO 208/1021

1. Comparison of Japanese Tactics on Okinawa and Iwo.

a. General

(1) A study of operational reports, captured documents, and PW interrogations discloses few basic variations between Japanese tactics on Iwo and on Okinawa. The few variances noted can be explained by the considerable difference in area between the two islands and by the smaller ratio of troops to area on Okinawa, rather than by any note-worthy development or change in Japanese tactics between the two campaigns.

(2) The ratio of Japanese to American casualties was considerably greater on Okinawa than on Iwo, but that is probably due largely to the more dispersed targets rather than to less effective tactics. The area of Okinawa is about 485 square miles, while that of Iwo is only about 6.5. Far more

(2) The troops on both islands appear to have been mostly well trained Army units which were better equipped than any Japanese troops so far encountered. The battlefield morale of the units on each island appears to have been high.

c. Casualties.

When the battle for Okinawa is completed, the total of Japanese dead and prisoners of war will be -- as on Iwo -- about equal to the total of the original garrison. On Iwo the ratio of Japanese to American casualties was about 1 to 1; on Okinawa it will be probably about 2-1/4 to 1. But the more favorable casualty ratio on Okinawa cannot be charged to a deterioration in Japanese tactics. It seems likely that, despite a very considerable number of artillery pieces and heavy infantry weapons, the Japanese have not been able to place the same volume of fire on critical targets on Okinawa as on Iwo. The less crowded

---

## PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA

---

### **What is this source?**

This source is an extract from a report looking at the experience of US troops fighting at Iwo Jima and the next big landing they took on, the island of Okinawa.

Okinawa was a much larger island than Iwo Jima with several large towns. It was also much closer to the main islands of Japan.

---

### **What's the background to this source?**

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA. In December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945, US forces reached the island of Iwo Jima, the first of Japan's homelands. Iwo Jima was taken after a month of fighting and US forces moved on to the island of Okinawa.

The Japanese plan at Iwo Jima was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28,000 (with over 8,000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21,000 dead out of a force of 22,000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide. It was a similar picture at Okinawa. Here the Japanese had more than 100,000 troops and virtually all of them died fighting the invading Americans.

---

### **It's worth knowing that...**

The casualties suffered by US Marines at Iwo Jima were the highest they suffered in the war. Almost one third of all Marines killed in WW2 died at Iwo. Over a quarter of the Medals of Honour won by Marines were won at Iwo Jima. The fighting was equally bitter at Okinawa, but was spread out over a bigger island.

Military advisers estimated that if the Allies had to carry on fighting in this way then the war would last into 1946 and the Allies would suffer over 200 000 more casualties. This seems to have been a key reason why the decision was taken to use the Atomic bomb against Japan.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/>

---

**How will you use this source?**

1. According to this source, did the Japanese use the same tactics on Okinawa as they did at Iwo Jima?
2. How reliable is this conclusion?
3. What differences were there between the two campaigns?
4. Were casualty rates and casualty numbers similar?
5. If you were a politician or a military commander in 1945, how would you view the prospect of invading the rest of the islands that made up Japanese territory?
6. Is there any information from the source or notes that you could use in your presentation?



PACIFIC 1939-1945: IWO JIMA

WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?

Photograph of the Iwo Jima campaign 21st February 1945

Catalogue ref: ADM 199/1061

Source a



YORK 288-6 - 1030 (-10), 21 FEB. 1945 - K17-24" - ALT. 2000'  
IWO JIMA - A DIVISION OF F6FS ATTACKING IN SUPPORT OF THE GROUND FORCES.

---

## PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA

---

### **What is this source?**

This photograph comes from an official report on the fighting at Iwo Jima. It shows a division of F6Fs (fighter bombers) attacking in support of ground forces. British naval officers, acting as observers, probably took the photograph as the main forces at Iwo Jima were American.

All of these materials were top secret at the time. The main reason for this detailed investigation was probably to see what further defences the Japanese might have built on the rest of their islands.

---

### **What's the background to this source?**

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945 US forces reached the first of the islands that made up Japan's homelands – Iwo Jima.

The attack began on February 19th 1945. The Japanese plan was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. The troops and their commander knew their role was to delay the Americans while their comrades prepared to defend the rest of Japan. It was effectively a suicide mission. Iwo Jima was heavily defended by over 20 000 troops with plenty of artillery and other equipment. They were dug into a system of caves and bunkers. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28 000 (with over 8000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21 000 dead out of a force of 22 000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide.

---

**PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA**

---

**It's worth knowing that...**

The political and military leaders of Japan were determined to fight to the bitter end, even though it was clear by 1945 that they had lost the war. At the time huge American bombing raids were devastating the Japanese mainland.

It may be that one of the reasons the Japanese fought so hard was to cause heavy casualties and try to get the Allies to negotiate peace rather than demand a Japanese surrender.

---

**How will you use this source?**

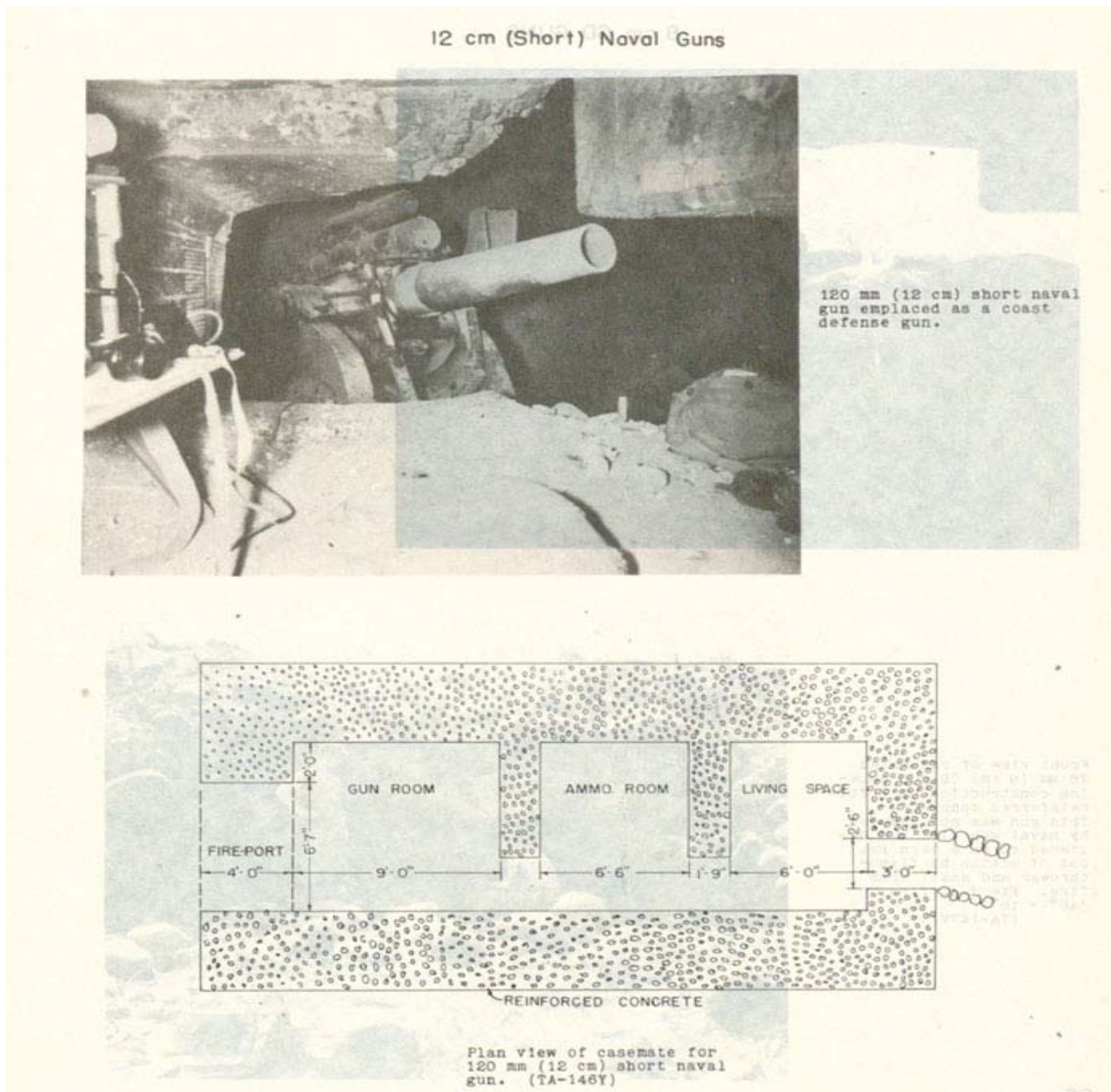
1. What is happening in the photograph?
2. Do you think an attack like this would have destroyed the defences shown in the other photographs in the source box?
3. Does this photograph help to explain the high casualties described in the report the Allied campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa?
4. If you were a politician or a military commander in 1945, how would this photograph affect your views about how to carry on the war against Japan?
5. Is there any information from the source or notes that you could use in your presentation?

**WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?**

**Photograph and diagram showing defences on Iwo Jima**

Catalogue ref: WO 208/1021

Source b



---

**PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA**

---

**What is this source?**

These images come from an official report on the fighting at Iwo Jima. British naval officers, acting as observers, probably took the photograph as the main forces at Iwo Jima were American.

All of these materials were top secret at the time. The main reason for this detailed investigation was probably to see what further defences the Japanese might have built on the rest of their islands.

---

**What's the background to this source?**

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945 US forces reached the first of the islands that made up Japan's homelands - Iwo Jima.

The attack began on February 19th 1945. The Japanese plan was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. The troops and their commander knew their role was to delay the Americans while their comrades prepared to defend the rest of Japan. It was effectively a suicide mission. Iwo Jima was heavily defended by over 20 000 troops with plenty of artillery and other equipment. They were dug into a system of caves and bunkers. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28 000 (with over 8000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21 000 dead out of a force of 22 000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide.

---

**PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA**

---

**It's worth knowing that...**

The political and military leaders of Japan were determined to fight to the bitter end, even though it was clear by 1945 that they had lost the war. At the time huge American bombing raids were devastating the Japanese mainland.

It may be that one of the reasons the Japanese fought so hard was to cause heavy casualties and try to get the Allies to negotiate peace rather than demand a Japanese surrender.

---

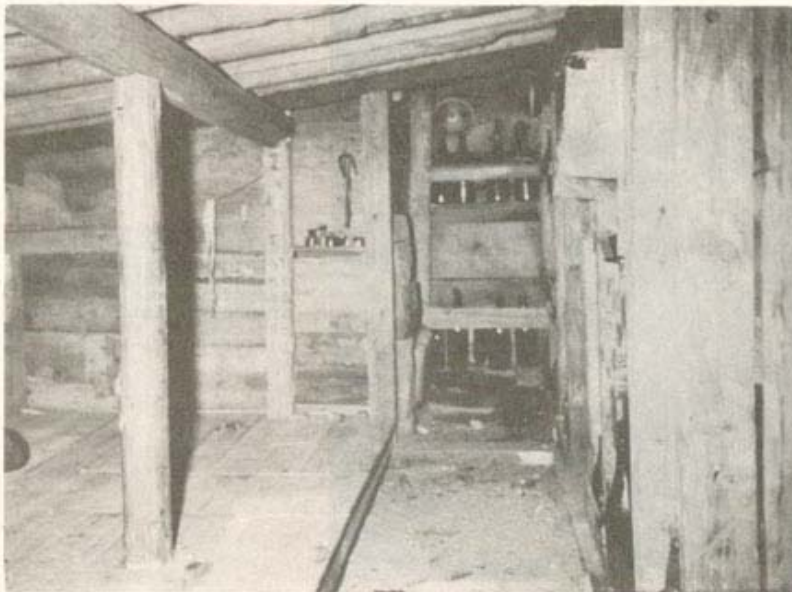
**How will you use this source?**

1. Study these images. Would attacks from fighter/bombers as shown in photograph a, have had much impact on these defences?
2. Do these images help to explain the high casualties described in the report the Allied campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa?
3. If you were a politician or a military commander in 1945, how would these images affect your views about how to carry on the war against Japan?
4. Is there any information from the source or notes that you could use in your presentation?

**WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?**

**Photographs showing defences on Iwo Jima**

Catalogue ref: WO 208/1021



Underground shelter having food, water and first aid supplies for personnel at 25 mm twin-mount automatic AA position. (TA-182Q)

General view of earth-covered structure containing 25 mm twin-mount automatic AA position, living quarters for personnel and ammunition storage. Note the natural grass for camouflage. (TA-164E)



55

---

## PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA

---

### **What is this source?**

These images come from an official report on the fighting at Iwo Jima. British naval officers, acting as observers, probably took the photograph as the main forces at Iwo Jima were American.

All of these materials were top secret at the time. The main reason for this detailed investigation was probably to see what further defences the Japanese might have built on the rest of their islands.

---

### **What's the background to this source?**

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945 US forces reached the first of the islands that made up Japan's homelands – Iwo Jima.

The attack began on February 19th 1945. The Japanese plan was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. The troops and their commander knew their role was to delay the Americans while their comrades prepared to defend the rest of Japan. It was effectively a suicide mission. Iwo Jima was heavily defended by over 20 000 troops with plenty of artillery and other equipment. They were dug into a system of caves and bunkers. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28 000 (with over 8000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21 000 dead out of a force of 22 000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide.



---

**PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA**

---

**It's worth knowing that...**

The political and military leaders of Japan were determined to fight to the bitter end, even though it was clear by 1945 that they had lost the war. At the time huge American bombing raids were devastating the Japanese mainland.

It may be that one of the reasons the Japanese fought so hard was to cause heavy casualties and try to get the Allies to negotiate peace rather than demand a Japanese surrender.

---

**How will you use this source?**

1. Study these images. Would attacks from fighter/bombers as shown in photograph a, have had much impact on these defences?
2. Do these images help to explain the high casualties described in the report the Allied campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa?
3. If you were a politician or a military commander in 1945, how would these images affect your views about how to carry on the war against Japan?
4. Is there any information from the source or notes that you could use in your presentation?

## WHY WAS THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA SO IMPORTANT TO AMERICA?

### Newsreel footage of the Marine Corps Memorial Statue

ITN Ref: BP010151255912

Courtesy of [ITN/Source](#), London.

The raising of the American flag atop Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi nears completion in Washington after six years of work. The 110 foot high model of five marines and one navy medical corpsman putting the flag on the first Japanese territory captured is based on the famous action picture.

Sculptor Felix de Welden is using the three survivors of the team and photographs of the others for the 32 foot high figures of the men.

The plaster model weighs over 100 tons. The finished bronze statue, largest of its kind in the world will be erected near the Capitol in Washington as a national memorial to the marine corps heroes of all wars.

## PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA

### What is this source?

This is an American newsreel that was broadcast in 1951. British audiences would have also seen it. The sculptor of the statue, Felix de Weldon based his work on the famous picture by Joe Rosenthal that you can see at the opening of this investigation. The men shown in the statue were famous in the months after Iwo Jima because the government used them in a campaign to raise money for the war effort.

In 1951 US Marines were back in action, this time in Korea. They were fighting against the forces of North Vietnam that had invaded America's ally South Vietnam.

---

### What's the background to this source?

During the 1930s Japan emerged as a major world power. It had ambitions to build a great empire in Asia and the Pacific. To do this Japan would have to defeat the USA, and in December 1941 Japanese forces attacked and sank the US Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Japanese successes continued into 1942 until May of that year when US forces destroyed Japan's aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway. From this point the USA gradually drove Japanese forces back. By 1945 US forces reached the first of the islands that made up Japan's homelands - Iwo Jima.

The attack began on February 19th 1945. The Japanese plan was to cause as many casualties as possible to the invading Americans. The troops and their commander knew their role was to delay the Americans while their comrades prepared to defend the rest of Japan. It was effectively a suicide mission. Iwo Jima was heavily defended by over 20 000 troops with plenty of artillery and other equipment. They were dug into a system of caves and bunkers. They fought ferociously. When the battle ended on March 16th 1945 US casualties totalled almost 28 000 (with over 8000 dead). Japanese casualties were almost 21 000 dead out of a force of 22 000. Those not killed in fighting committed suicide.

---

### It's worth knowing that...

The American film star John Wayne made a film called the Sands of Iwo Jima in 1949. This was very patriotic and glorified the campaign. It is said to have inspired many young Americans to join the Marines during the war in Korea 1950-53. By contrast, the 2006 film Flags of Our Fathers by Hollywood director Clint Eastwood was more realistic and focused more on the human experience of the battle.

**PACIFIC 1939–1945: IWO JIMA**

Eastwood was so inspired by his research for the film that he decided to make another film about Iwo Jima called *Letters From Iwo Jima*. This was filmed in Japanese and presented the Japanese point of view.

---

**How will you use this source?**

1. Describe the statue shown in the clip
2. How can you tell Americans are proud of this statue?
3. What does this film tell us about the importance of Iwo Jima to Americans?
4. Is there any information from the source or notes that you could use in your presentation?