

1945 May 14-20

View from the Other Side

It is difficult for people on opposing sides of an issue to see things from a perspective other than their own. When the issue is a war, it is nearly impossible.

Those of us who grew up watching war movies only saw "good guys" and "bad guys." The "good guys" on our side almost always prevailed over the "bad guys" in the end. Even if there had been another viewpoint presented, it would have been very uncomfortable for us.

There have been some excellent motion pictures that provided insightful perspectives on the opposing side. "All Quiet on the Western Front," following a squad of German soldiers during World War I, is an antiwar classic.¹ "Das Boot" took us inside a German U-boat in the early days of World War II.² More recently, Clint Eastwood's "Letters from Iwo Jima" depicted the 1945 battle of Iwo Jima through the eyes of several Japanese characters.³

In real life outside of Hollywood, interviews, diaries, and letters are valuable primary sources for viewing other people's perspectives. Soldiers in combat were usually prohibited from keeping diaries and letters were often burned to prevent the enemy from gaining information from them should they fall into enemy hands.

The following article from the *La Crosse Tribune* prints excerpts from the diary of a Japanese soldier who died defending the island of Iwo Jima from United States Marines.

Japs Fought Hard, But Could Not Save Island, Diary States

Corp. Art Blaha, who fought on Iwo with the 5th Marine Division, recently sent his mother, Mrs. Frank Blaha, 1709 South Ninth street, a copy of a portion of a Jap soldier's diary. It follows:



BLAHA

"Feb. 19. The enemy have finally landed. From now on, I live only to fight. I have no hope of surviving, I shall lead my squad till the last moment. We will defend our position to the death. This is goodbye. I am praying for good luck for everybody. Long live the emperor."

"Feb. 20. My comrades have fallen one by one. I have been fortunate enough to remain alive. Under artillery and air protection, the enemy has landed and occupied the one airfield. Our infiltration units are waging a bloody struggle. Not even one friendly plane can be seen. Today, we will bravely attempt to destroy enemy tanks."

Jap Forces Driven Back

"Feb. 21. After three days of bloody combat, the southern coast has been seized and the No. 1 air field is in the hands of the enemy. Our forces have been driven back. These are sad days. Our company will try to defend our defense perimeter to the death. The enemy first made use of a heavy naval bombardment and used tanks as the spearhead of his advance. He has already landed 15,000 men and 130 tanks. The courage of our in-

filtration units has prevented the enemy from advancing very far. Oh these brave men!

"Feb. 22. Today our special attack units sank some enemy ships. Supported by naval and aerial bombardment, the enemy is gradually overrunning our prepared positions. It is sad to see our comrades and all our brave men from Kyushu fighting valiantly to check the enemy on the number one airfield."

"Feb. 24. Day after day, we pit our flesh and our bullets against planes, tanks and naval gunfire. We're not afraid of the enemy infantry, but it is certainly terrible that we do not have even one ship or plane. People of Japan, send us airplanes! If we had planes, as the Americans and British, our task would be easy. Tomorrow is our turn."

Urges Building Planes

"Feb. 25. Tomorrow we will attempt to destroy the enemy tanks at one blow. No matter what people say, war today is a question of ships and planes. Build planes as fast as you can, people of Japan, work vigorously!"

"Feb. 26. Today is my day. We will charge shouting, 'Long live the Emperor!' My friend today led six men in an infiltration attack against the enemy. I am writing this only 200 meters from the enemy lines."

"Feb. 27. Two of the six are dead, one is wounded and I am still unharmed. 1600 tomorrow will be my last day. People of Japan, we make no excuses to you. We have struggled as hard as we could, but, unfortunately, we cannot hold this island."

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Sources & Notes:

¹ "All Quiet on the Western Front," *Wikipedia*, accessed 2020 May 25,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Quiet_on_the_Western_Front.

² "Das Boot," *Wikipedia*, accessed 2020 May 25, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Boot.

³ Mark Deming, "Letters from Iwo Jima (2006)," *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed 2020 May 25,
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/letters_from_iwo_jima.