



Record photo by DAVID FINCH

TO BE HONORED: Iwo Jima veteran Chuck Tatum will be part of a 60th anniversary observance of the victory at Iwo Jima. Part of the event will feature a display of the forthcoming U.S. postal tribute to Marine Corps heroes.

Heroes remembered

Local Marines will gather Saturday with friends and family to observe the 60th anniversary of the victory at Iwo Jima

By **Howard Lachtman**
 Record Staff Writer

Chuck Tatum and other Stocktonian survivors of Iwo Jima remember the black, volcanic sand that made the going heavy for their Marine invasion force that cold February morning in 1945.

"It soaked up your progress," said Tatum, 79, then a wide-eyed private seeing his first combat. "You became winded, worn out."

"That sand was terrible to dig a hole in," said Ted Salisbury, 82, then a platoon sergeant. "It kept filling back in. You were scared to death because you didn't have a place to hide."

Memories such as these will fill the air Saturday night as local Marine veterans gather with families and friends to observe the 60th anniversary of the victory at Iwo Jima — the costliest Marine campaign of World War II. The event is open to the public.

Vietnam veteran Ray Bael is commandant of the Stockton Marine Corps Club, which is sponsoring the event. Seven of the club's 72 members are Iwo Jima survivors, he said.

"They were there, and they made history," Bael said. "These guys were the greatest generation. They helped win the war in the Pacific. Every Marine remembers Iwo Jima."



Photo courtesy RAY JACOBS AND RAY BAEL

FIRST TIME: Sgt. Lou Lowery captured this image of the first flag-raising on Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945.

Across the nation, many gathered Feb. 19 for "Day One" observances, but the local club decided to set its own time and place for a commemoration.

Saturday's event will feature a display of the forthcoming U.S. postal tribute to Marine Corps heroes, photos and displays

from Iwo Jima and a keynote address by former TV broadcaster Raymond Jacobs, of Lake Tahoe, who witnessed the first Marine flag-raising atop Mount Suribachi.

"We're celebrating the date of the victory, not the beginning of the battle," Tatum said. "We felt

Iwo Jima Commemoration

- **WHEN:** Saturday. Registration and panels, 2-5 p.m. Banquet and ceremonies 5 p.m.
- **WHERE:** Best Western Stockton Inn, 4219 E. Waterloo Road, Stockton
- **ADMISSION:** \$35, reservations required. No walk-ins.
- **CONTACT:** (209) 478-2790 or (209) 466-1202

that was more appropriate on the 60th anniversary."

He and other vets say they didn't expect to make it off the island. Shortly after their unopposed landing, heavy mortar and artillery fire from well-entrenched Japanese defenders began to take a deadly toll. When the island was secured on March 26, the defenders had suffered 21,000 casualties. The cost to the Marines: 6,800 dead and 19,000 wounded, including survivors Tatum and Salisbury.

"The Japanese were dug in so deep they were down there playing cards while the shells were going off," Salisbury said.

When the shelling stopped and Marines advanced, murderous fire greeted them.

"I remember being terribly afraid," said Salisbury.

Please see HEROES, F6



Record photo by DAVID FINCH

SHARING THEIR STORIES: World War II veterans Ted Salisbury, left, Chuck Tatum and Lory Lucchesi will take part in a local commemoration of the victory at Iwo Jima.

HEROES

Continued from F1

He also remembers thinking "I'm going to buy the farm on this one." But his luck held. Though a shell killed two buddies next to him, he survived with only a knee wound.

"There's no answer to why," Salisbury said of his survival. "It was the luck of the draw."

For Tatum, things got hot in a hurry when Sgt. John Basilone — a Medal of Honor winner on Guadalcanal — decided to charge a fortified Japanese position. He needed Tatum's .30-caliber machine gun. And Tatum, too.

"He whacked me on the helmet to make me stop firing, took my machine gun and hollered in my ear, 'Get the belt!' I grabbed the ammunition belt and followed him and we ran together up the incline to the back of a Japanese pill box," Tatum said.

With Tatum's assistance, Basilone succeeded in wiping

out the enemy position. Later killed by mortar fire, Basilone was recommended for a second Medal of Honor.

"The word spread like wildfire that Basilone had been killed," Tatum said. "It was a horrible shock to me. You're thinking, he's the most heroic guy in the Marine Corps, and he got killed. What am I going to do?"

After 14 days, the wounded, combat-fatigued Tatum was taken off the island. Fifty years later, he wrote his acclaimed account of the battle, "Red Blood, Black Sand" and produced a video of the same name, as well as a video about the legacy of John Basilone.

Today, Tatum serves as consultant to an HBO miniseries called "The Pacific," developing a Pacific island companion piece to "Band of Brothers." Produced by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks, the series is scheduled to air in 2007.

Series creator and head writer Bruce McKenna, who wrote several "Band of Brothers" epi-

sodes, said Tatum has been "a fantastic resource, a tremendous trooper" in providing accurate details about life and battle conditions in the World War II Marine Corps and serving under the legendary Basilone.

"We optioned Chuck's book, and we anticipate having a character in the series named Chuck Tatum to depict Chuck's initiation into combat under the tutelage of John Basilone," McKenna said.

Tatum will on Saturday present an overview of the Battle of Iwo Jima, which transformed him into a soldier and eyewitness historian.

"It was more like a siege than a battle," Tatum said. "We couldn't see the enemy. We were out in the open, and they had concrete positions. It was an unfair fight, but the Marines took it anyway."

To reach reporter Howard Lachtman, phone (209) 546-8269 or e-mail lachtman@recordnet.com