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ENGL 1013

Date

Two World War II Battles

During World War II, there were many devastating battles. Two of those battles, the Battle of Iwo Jima and the Battle of Okinawa, were considered the most famous battles in the Pacific. However, these two battles were very different in the size, the value, and the outcome of the battle.

The first difference is the size of the battles. Iwo Jima is at the south end of the Bonin chain of islands. The island of Iwo Jima is about 4.5 miles long and about 2.5 miles at the widest point (Trueman, "Iwo Jima"). The 7.5 square mile island is 670 miles away from Japan and is a part of the Osagawara Islands. The invasion of Iwo Jima was code named Operation Detachment (Walker). The battle took place with a total of 70,000 U.S. troops under the command of Admiral Raymond Spruance against 27,000 Japanese troops under the command of General Kuribayashi ("The Battle of Iwo Jima"). The Americans were divided up into Navy forces and Marine forces. The battle strategy was for the Navy to bomb and shell the island, followed by the Marines invading the island on the ground (Walker). During the battle, many bombers were used to bomb the island as well as ships ("The Battle of Iwo Jima"). Kuribayashi decided to hold on to the island as long as possible (Walker). So the Japanese were dug in, making it very difficult for the Americans (Wheeler 42). The Japanese built tunnels and caves equipped with machine guns, mortars, and heavy armory. These defenses were built to withstand ship and plane bombings and could hold up to 300 to 400 men (Walker).

Unlike Iwo Jima, Okinawa was a large island. Out of all the Ryukyus Islands, Okinawa is the largest. It is about 60 miles long and ranges from 2 to 18 miles wide. American intelligence had predicted that the number of Japanese troops on the island was about 65,000. After the battle, American intelligence estimated over 130,000 Japanese troops. Under the command of Lieutenant-General Simon Buckner, 180,000 American troops were sent to invade Okinawa (Trueman, "Okinawa"). The invading fleet consisted of more than 40 aircraft carriers, 18 battleships, 200 destroyers, and other ships, totaling to over 1300 U.S. ships. This would be "the greatest naval armada ever" (Pike, "Okinawa"). The battle of Okinawa was given the code name Operation Iceberg. There were three different branches: the Army, the Navy, and the Marines. The Okinawa battle strategy involved Navy planes and ships bombing and shelling the island while Army troops and Marines invaded the island (Appleman et al.).

Besides the differences in size, the battles held different values for the Japanese and Americans. The Japanese used the island of Iwo Jima as an airbase to attack American bombers on their way to bomb Japan (Trueman, "Iwo Jima"). The Japanese had three airstrips used for air strikes and kamikaze attacks ("The Battle of Iwo Jima"). If the Americans were successful, they could use the island as a place for emergency landing. They could also use Iwo Jima as a place for launching fighter planes to escort the bombers on their bombing run to Japan (Trueman, "Iwo Jima"). The Americans had been bombing Japan with B-29s. Capturing this island would help Americans continue the bombing raids and give them a close airbase to Japan ("The Battle of Iwo Jima").

Whoever had control over Iwo Jima could decide the fate of the American bombers; Okinawa's value was of a different sort. The main goal for taking Okinawa, for the Americans, was to secure a place to plan and execute an invasion of Japan. After they would take this island,

they would be able to invade the Japanese homeland (Appleman et al.). If they had to invade the Japanese islands, Okinawa would be a very necessary place to store ships, troops, aircrafts, and supplies (Pike, "Okinawa"). They also needed to take the four airfields that the Japanese were holding (Trueman, "Okinawa"). For the Japanese, this island was heavily fortified with airbases and well-equipped tunnels and caves containing machine guns, mortars, and massive artillery. Okinawa contained the main defenses for their homeland (Pike, "Okinawa").

Other than the value and the size differences, the outcome and impacts were very different. During the Battle of Iwo Jima, 6821 Americans and about 20,000 Japanese lost their lives ("The Battle of Iwo Jima"). The Japanese were completely land bound with no planes or ships to help them out, which meant no planes or ships were lost (Walker). This battle would show the extent that the Japanese would go to protect their country. This would influence the debate about the atomic bombs (Trueman, "Iwo Jima"). After the battle, the airfields were used for emergency landings for planes on their way to Japan or other places ("The Battle of Iwo Jima"). It also became a military base for planned airstrikes on Japan (Walker). The media impact was tremendous. Even today there is the United States Marine Corps War Memorial that is the image of the photograph taken of the men rising the flag on Mount Suribachi (Pike, "Iwo Jima").

Okinawa's outcome and impact were completely different than Iwo Jima's. During the battle, 12,520 Americans and 110,000 Japanese lost their lives (Appleman et al.). Also there were 100,000 Okinawan civilians who died in battle as well. So a total of 219,000 lost their lives, more people than as a result of both atomic bombs combined (Pike, "Okinawa"). The Americans lost 763 planes and 36 ships. The Japanese lost 7800 planes and 16 ships. As soon as the battle had been won, the Americans started to prepare for the invasion into Japan. But in the

middle of all this preparation, they learned the greatest news: the war was over! Americans saw this battle as the “last of World War II” (Appleman et al.). But in spite of all this, the Battle of Okinawa was somewhat forgotten. Two weeks after the battle had started, the President, Franklin Roosevelt, died. A month later the Germans surrendered. A little over a month after the battle, the Soviet Union joined the fight against Japan. The final push out of newspapers, and probably the greatest, was the news on both the atomic bombs. All of these events together covered up the events of Okinawa (Duits).

These two battles are completely different. The Battle of Okinawa was bigger, was of different value, and had a greater impact on the outcome of World War II than the Battle of Iwo Jima, but because of concurrent events, it was forgotten.

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