



DCMA PACIFIC EMPLOYEES VISIT IWO TO (IWO JIMA) ISLAND

By Air Force Col. Michael Luft, DCMA Pacific Commander



Air Force Col. Michael Luft, Defense Contract Management Agency Pacific commander, places a DCMA Pacific commander's coin at the Mt. Suribachi flag raising monument. Also shown, from left: Akiko Yoneda, Marine Lt. Col. Aaron Camele, Hiroaki Tsutsumi, Tamimi Ono, Julie Sexton, Ayako Tada, Richard Jester, Sheila Osawa and Manuel Guevarra.

Members of Defense Contract Management Agency Pacific and DCMA Japan participated in a professional development mission to the Japanese Island of Iwo To, Nov. 22, 2009. The island, known as Iwo Jima to most Americans, was the site of one of the most significant World War II battles in the Pacific Theater.

Now used as a Japanese training base, Iwo To is home to Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces (Navy). U.S. Naval personnel also perform temporary duty on Iwo To, conducting aircrew flight

qualifications as part of carrier group deployments throughout Asia. The island is not open to non-Department of Defense personnel, and, due to limited services on site, the opportunity to visit is an extremely rare occurrence for both Japanese nationals and DoD personnel.

Members of the mission departed Naval Air Facility Atsugi, south of Tokyo, in a U.S. Navy C-130 aircraft and headed 2.5 hours southeast to the remote island sometimes referred to as Sulfur Island during WWII for its volcanic nature. The

team observed sulfurous gasses venting through massive sinkholes that developed over the years in the still-active volcano. The most recent volcanic activity occurred in 2001. DCMA team members were able to see firsthand the effects of the constant shifting land mass, as both roads and runways can shift significantly over short periods of time causing almost 12-inch movements in mere months.

The DCMA team had the opportunity to examine several Japanese bunkers and caves, some of which still house artillery pieces and war debris left as they were in February and March 1945. In total, there are 150 bunkers, pillboxes, machine-gun nests and 11 miles of hand-dug caves on the island. Although most of the scattered shells, ammunition and shrapnel are clearly expended, unexploded ordnance is frequently found on the island.

DCMA team members took the opportunity to tour the former Imperial Japanese hospital cave, where they observed the harsh, primitive conditions on the island and felt the heat from the volcano that intensified as they traveled further into the complex. Local instructions advise taking a candle into the cave; when the flame extinguishes, it's time to leave due to poor air circulation. In February 1984, when the cave was opened, it contained the mummified remains

of 54 Japanese service members entombed there. At the entrance are some of the artifacts found in the cave, such as medical canteens, baskets, kettles, shoes, gasoline drums, etc. — hints of its active past.

One of the highlights of the trip was reaching the top of Mt. Suribachi, the highest point on Iwo To. “Suribachi” is the Japanese word for earthenware mortar, a bowl used to grind grains into powder. The mountain was given this name because its shape resembles an upturned bowl. It is here that the iconic photo of the raised Marine flag was captured by Joe Rosenthal on Feb. 23, 1945. Although the last full-scale eruption occurred in 1727, looking into the center of the crater, steam can be seen rising from a vent while the smell of sulfur permeates every breath.

The view of the entire island from the top of Suribachi emphasizes its military significance as the 2.5-mile Invasion Beach, location of the initial Marine landings, lay directly in view. On the site of the raised flag are two memorials — one for the U.S. Marines and another for the Japanese defenders. A unique experience for the DCMA team, they observed our Japanese employees paying their respects



From left: Akiko Yoneda, Defense Contract Management Agency Japan administrative specialist, and Tamimi Ono, DCMA Pacific administrative specialist, pray at the Japanese monument at Mt. Suribachi.

to those countrymen who died defending the island. While at the summit, the entire team participated as I placed my DCMA commander’s coin at the monument honoring the raised Marine flag.

Ayako Tada, DCMA Japan contract specialist, noted, “The most impressive moment during this tour for me was getting on the top of Mt. Suribachi. At that moment, I realized, ‘I am Japanese, and they were American,’ and we

used to be enemies a long time ago. After getting over with all pains, sufferings and sacrifices, we became friends. I’ve always known about it but never actually felt like this until that moment. I have come to feel more close to American people since then.”

While exploring Invasion Beach, DCMA team members got to see firsthand the difficulty U.S. Marines had landing on the island’s coarse, black volcanic sand. Although initial waves

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Manuel Guevarra, Defense Contract Management Agency Pacific management analyst, explores the Imperial Navy Hospital Cave on Iwo To Island.

of Marines encountered light resistance, eventually withering crossfire from Mt. Suribachi and gun emplacements further north on the island made the landing one of the most difficult in the Pacific. Adjacent to the beach, a memorial was erected in 1985, the 40th anniversary of the landings. Veterans of both sides attended the event and inscriptions are engraved both in Japanese and English honoring the former foes.

At the conclusion of the Battle of Iwo Jima, more than 21,700

Japanese died, and the Allied forces suffered 27,909 casualties. Twenty-seven Marines and Sailors were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions, 14 posthumously. Today, Iwo To is peaceful and lush with vegetation, barely hinting at the devastation that occurred in 1945.

Tamami Ono, DCMA Pacific administrative specialist, remarked, “When I landed there, I felt sad, and I was nervous. So many people, American and Japanese, died at the

battle. And 64 years after the battle, we were there peacefully.”

The mission to Iwo To was particularly special for two members of the DCMA team. Akiko Yoneda, DCMA Japan administrative specialist, felt a special connection to the island as her great uncle was among the Japanese survivors of which there were fewer than 300. Also with a family connection is U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Aaron Camele, DCMA Japan commander, whose

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great cousin also fought in the battle and personally viewed the raising of the Marine flag.

DCMA Pacific and DCMA Japan employees who took part in the mission to Iwo To experienced an incredibly unique piece of history that few people ever get to witness. Julie Sexton, DCMA Pacific business process advisor, shared, “I was more

familiar with the European battles of WWII, but in preparing for this trip, I came to understand the vast differences experienced in the Pacific battles and the full meaning of Sir Winston Churchill’s words, ‘Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few,’ as I stood in the place where, in the roughest circumstances, warriors gave

all for their country — incredibly humbling and an incredible opportunity to pay homage.”

The professional development mission allowed team members to interact with our Japanese hosts and pay tribute to the reverence of the island for both the Japanese and U.S. 🌐



Remains of a World War II Japanese bunker can still be found on Iwo To Island.