

Get off the beach



As marines exited their landing craft onto the beaches of Iwo Jima in the morning of 19 February 1945, they initially met little resistance, giving them hope that the capture of the island would be over quickly. Shortly after 10am, however, the hidden Japanese opened up on the crowded beach with artillery, mortar and machine gun fire, quickly turning it into a nightmarish death zone. Many marines sought refuge in shell holes, often paralyzed by the overwhelming and deadly destruction around them. Because of the massive firepower of the enemy, moving forward must have felt like

certain death, but to stay put amidst rolling artillery barrages and mortar fire was equally dooming.

In the middle of the storm of lead and fire on that Iwo Jima D-day, as marines took what cover they could find, Colonel Harry Liversedge and Lt. Colonel Robert Williams came marching up from a landing craft, walking upright as if completely oblivious to the danger around them, and shouting at marines to get off the beach and move forward. One marine recorded his memory of the events: "It was an amazing thing. They walked the length of the dog-gone beach, yelling at the men, and the marines just did it. They got right up and started to move. Of course it jarred me and I got up and we made it over the [dunes]."

The Message

There are times in life when it feels like there is nowhere to go, and darkness and destruction seem to be all around us. Going back to "the way things were" is usually not an option, but the way forward seems so fraught with peril that there is no clear way to go. Perhaps your marriage or relationship is on the rocks or has ended. Maybe you are struggling to find fulfillment in your job, or suffering from the results of bad past decision. Or you may be dealing with physical or emotional pain or injury. There is, in such times, a tendency to freeze; to hunker down, curl up with hands over ears trying to shut out the noise and hope that, like a storm, our personal battles blow over somehow. Many individuals emotionally withdraw or may turn to unhealthy or risky behavior as a way to distract themselves from the anxiety of their situation. But such avoidance behaviors only complicate the situation. No matter how difficult the problems ahead, they must be faced. Wallowing in a hole, lamenting being stuck in such a horrible situation solves nothing. You are still stuck on the beach. The only way out of the nightmare is to go forward...to get off the beach.

Marines, are trained to push forward with a focus on the objective, despite overwhelming opposition. Life's battles are no different. Trust your training, rely on those around you, follow the example of leaders, and attack the objective. The only way out is forward.

(JT)