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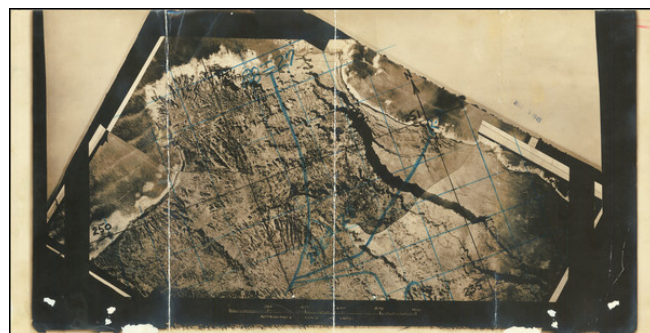
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(World War II) [Iwo Jima Aerial Reconnaissance Photograph, March 8, 1945]

Stock#: 83776
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1945
Place: n.p.
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 20 x 10 inches

Price: \$ 2,800.00



Description:

Original WWII Aerial Reconnaissance Photograph From the Battle of Iwo Jima

The Japanese Stronghold in the Northern Tip of Iwo Jima

A fascinating visual artifact from World War II: a wartime aerial reconnaissance photograph of the northern tip of Iwo Jima island, made on March 8, 1945, thus documenting part of the island while the American invasion was fully underway. This map appears to show the area around Kitano Point, with a portion of the northern coastline of the island. White waters along the beaches are clearly visible in the photograph.

The neatly drawn blue grid lines would appear to be related to continued reconnaissance efforts being conducted by the Americans. Similar grid systems can be seen on printed "Special Air and Gunnery Target" maps of Iwo Jima used by the invading forces to pinpoint targets. It would seem likely that such aerial photographs informed the making of the printed target maps; indeed these kinds of photographs must have been crucial tools to the ongoing operation at Iwo Jima.

The northern tip was a Japanese stronghold, characterized by rocky terrain which favored their defenses. While General Kuribayashi organized the southern part of the island around Mount Suribachi as a sort of independent sector, he built up the northern part of the island as his main defensive zone. According to estimates, the Japanese had the equivalent of eight infantry battalions, a tank regiment, and two artillery and three heavy mortar battalions in the region. There were also about 5,000 gunners and naval infantry.

The date of this photograph places this image at a critical moment in the struggle for the northern part of the island.

The 5th Marine Division still faced Kuribayashi's stronghold in a gorge 640 meters long at the



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northwestern end of the island. On March 21, the Marines destroyed the command post in the gorge with four tons of explosives and on March 24, Marines sealed the remaining caves at the northern tip of the island. However, on the night of 25 March, a 300-man Japanese force launched a final counterattack in the vicinity of Airfield No. 2 (not shown on the present photograph). Army pilots and Marines of the 5th Pioneer Battalion and 28th Marines fought the Japanese force for up to 90 minutes, suffering heavy casualties (53 killed, 120 wounded). Kuribayashi supposedly led a final assault, making him the highest ranking Japanese officer to have personally led an attack during World War II. The island was officially declared secure at 09:00 on March 26.

Historical context of the photograph.

The invasion of Iwo Jima was designated Operation Detachment, and had as its primary goal the taking of the island's two airfields, South Field and Central Field. Beginning in June of 1944, the U.S. Navy and Army Air Force began an intense bombing campaign against Iwo Jima, the longest such air and naval bombardment in the Pacific Theater, lasting some nine months. Not apparent in the image is the extensive tunnel system built by the Japanese that led to underground bunkers, some as deep as 90 feet below the surface. Unaware of the Japanese tunnel defense network, many on the American side believed that most of the Japanese garrison had been wiped out by the unrelenting bombing raids. The tunnels and underground bunkers were evidence that the Japanese had been preparing for an invasion of the island for months. During the battle itself, the U.S. marines (comprising a force of 60,000) faced all manner of problems not envisioned during the planning. First, the beaches were not easy for the marines to advance upon, being characterized by 15-foot high slopes of soft black ash, which prevented secure footing for the construction of foxholes. But much more devastating was that General Kuribayashi waited for the landing marines to unload quantities of men and machinery on the beaches for at least an hour before unleashing a barrage of firepower that resulted in a terrible bloodbath. In the ensuing battle, Japanese resistance was aided by the tunnel system, which allowed for swift attacks under cover of night. Eventually the Japanese began to run out of water and supplies. Most fought to the death. The M2 flamethrower was used extensively in Iwo Jima to kill Japanese holed up in caves and so-called pillbox positions. For some three months after the island was declared secure by the Americans, the Army's 147 Infantry Regiment continued to ferret out these last defenders (some 1600 were killed at this late date), who resisted the Americans from well-supplied caves. The last of these stalwarts, two men under Toshihiko Ohno, lasted four years until finally surrendering in 1949.

Background and importance of wartime aerial photography.

The importance of such aerial reconnaissance photographs in wartime planning is well documented. While some pioneering examples of wartime aerial photography made from balloons are known from the 19th



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century, the use of aerial reconnaissance photographs made from airplanes came into its own during World War I. In fact the renowned photographer Edward Steichen was one of the key figures from the WWI era of aerial reconnaissance photography. Steichen was also involved in WWII era war photography, but by that time his work was documentary in nature, aimed at a public audience.

One can see in the present photograph how the Navy had developed Steichen's techniques to good advantage. In the context of the Pacific Theater of World War II, given the use of hidden artillery positions constructed by the Japanese army, it is hard to image the United States operating without the aid of aerial photography.

If the iconic Joe Rosenthal AP press photo of U.S. Marines hoisting the flag atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima captured the public's imagination in the path to victory during the war, the present aerial reconnaissance image shows the important practical application of photography in the day-to-day conduct of the war; it is stark evidence of the crucial nature of photography as a tool of war.

Rarity.

While copies of the iconic Joe Rosenthal press photo appear at auction with some regularity, original aerial reconnaissance photographs of Iwo Jima, especially prints made during the war for the use of the U.S. military during a major invasion or battle (as in the present photo), are very rare on the market.

Detailed Condition:

Original black and white photograph print. Old vertical fold marks. Ink date stamp: Mar. 8, 1945. Blue grease pencil grid, and some numbers written in the same color.