

# News and stories

## WWII Vets, Japanese Meet to Remember Iwo Jima

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Marine Corps News

IWO TO, Japan -- On a sunny, breezy day, veterans of World War II gathered at Iwo To March 24, 2018 to commemorate the sacrifice made by members of the Japanese and U.S. forces killed during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

"Seventy-three years ago, this island was the site of a brutal struggle between young men who were warriors of the enemy nations, the United States of America and the Empire of Japan," said retired Marine Lt. Gen. Norman Smith, President of the Iwo Jima Association of America, during the 73rd Reunion of Honor ceremony.

The ceremony gave active duty and veteran military members and their families the opportunity to honor the fallen and celebrate the invaluable 73-year friendship forged from the pivotal battle between Japan and the U.S.

The ceremony included speakers from both nations, to include notable individuals such as Itsunori Onodera, the Japanese Minister of Defense; Yoshitaka Shindo, the grandson of Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi; and Brig. Gen. Thomas D. Weidley, commanding general, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. It also included a wreath-laying and water dedication ceremony in honor of the thousands of lives

lost in the battle and the resulting alliance held by Japan and the U.S. today.

"I hope they continue coming back to the island [for this ceremony], because this island has such tremendous meaning in the lives of so many World War II guys," said Medal of Honor recipient retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Hershel "Woody" Williams. "I hope they continue to do it, because it does create a bond and a fellowship with a country that one time we were at war with."

Onodera said the sacrifice of those who gave their lives during the battle and the war must never be forgotten because of the era of alliance and partnership the resulting peace ushered in for both nations.

"We must never forget the noble sacrifices of those who gave their lives in war as we enjoy peace and prosperity today," Onodera said. "We must continue our efforts to pass on such facts to future generations."

The Battle of Iwo Jima was a grueling 31-day battle, where more than 110,000 American landing forces stormed the black-sand beaches of the small island to face-off against approximately 21,000 entrenched Japanese soldiers. At the end of the bloody hostilities, approximately 26,000 men had been killed in the battle.

Weidley was keen to emphasize the importance of honoring the past in order to appreciate the present and look forward to the future.

"I think this ceremony is a way to honor those who have gone before us," Weidley said. "Over 26,000 members of both our nations perished on this battlefield. It's hallowed ground, and we hold this ceremony every year here to remember the fallen, to remember the past, and to reflect on where we've been and how far we have come since then. We can look forward into the future of our alliance that is stronger than ever, after an era of reconciliation that has led both countries to prosper for many, many years."