



Welcome aboard our Coast Guard **Loran Station Iwo Jima**

by HM2 James L. Knapp, Loran Station Iwo Jima

Picture yourself in the middle of what some people call paradise, the Pacific Ocean, with black sandy beaches, swept by the soothing sounds of a tropical island washed by thousands of years of tranquillity. Then realize that this picture and the place I write of, Sulphur Island, more commonly known as Iwo Jima, played a decisive role in the history of the United States and the world as we know it today.

This sub-tropical island, eight miles square and located 650 miles south west of Japan, was, before WWII, a little thought of Japanese colony whose sole support was sulphur mining and what small amount of sugar cane that could be wrestled from the soil. With the beginning of the war and the sudden strategic importance of Iwo, the little known island would see two mighty nations do battle at the cost of several thousand lives to secure its shores.

The original Loran station was established on

Kanguku rock in 1944 before the final sounds of battle faded. The station moved to its present site as a member of a Loran A chain in 1949. Now it sits on the northern most part of the island, on the dormant volcano Motoyama, with the 1350-foot tower standing a mere 500-yards from the cave that the Japanese Commanding General Kuribayashi used as a command post during the battle. The cave also became the general's final resting place.

The station is now a member master of the North West Pacific Loran-C chain, with links to its secondary units at: Hokkaido, Yap, Marcus Island and Gesashi and monitoring stations at Yokota and Saipan.

The station is headed by two officers, a lieutenant who is the commanding officer and a warrant electrician who serves as executive officer. The complement of 26 enlisted people share many collateral duties but have the basic



U.S. Coast Guard Loran Station Iwo Jima, as viewed from 1,000 feet up the 1,350 foot transmitting tower stands, "Always Ready," to serve

the International Mariners of the North West Pacific. Photo by LT G. O. Kinney, LORST/ Iwo Jima

specialties that make them an integral part of the station.

The climate is predictable, warm days and warm nights followed by more warm days and warmer nights. The water supply for the station is solely dependent on the weather, making rain a very common topic of discussion. Most places where the Coast Guard is, rain puts a damper on things, but on Iwo it is a real cause for celebration. When it does rain the two most frequently heard comments are, "I hope it rains for a week just like this," and "If this keeps up, hotel showers for sure."

Iwo Jima, like most places, is what you make of it. But here on the "sulfur island" there are many diversions not found elsewhere. Caves dug by the Japanese forces are still full of artifacts from the war. Jungle stomping with friends just to see where the trail leads or to find a cave that has been unseen by anyone for 36 years can keep you busy. Tennis with no long waits for the court, swimming in a lava formation, diving into the deep blue Pacific or fishing where you can see the fish in the crystal clear

water before they strike your hook can take almost anyone's fancy. Perhaps the most hypnotic and addicting pastime is watching sunsets from mount Surabachi, where the sky seems to bleed the deepest hues, unobstructed by giant buildings or the stench of air pollution.

Of course Iwo does have its drawbacks. Living on a volcanic island there is a fair amount of sulphur around together with its acrid odor. Leaving one's family behind with a 10,000 mile separation can sometimes be quite depressing. But the time passes quickly and new friendships are made to fill the void until it's your turn to leave.

The Japanese have a small base on the island that is expanding. Our exposure to another culture is very rewarding, especially the taste of new and different foods, chop sticks and learning to communicate.

All of us on Iwo Jima are proud to be Americans serving America and the many international mariners that share the common bond of Loran and the sea.