

Audio courtesy Library of Congress (Marine Corps Combat Recordings LWO 5442 r3B5)

"4th Marine Division post office on Iwo Jima," Feb. 21, 1945 (6 min, 20 sec)

Person 1:

How many pieces of mail would you say is handled in an average day out of one of these operations?

Person 2:

The average day? It's about twenty five thousand.

Person 1:

Has it been running true to form here on Iwo Jima?

Person 2:

No, uh, we've got more than, uh, we got a hundred and sixty three thousand pieces today.

Person 1:

That's your peak day, is it?

Person 2:

That's right. So far.

Person 1:

Well, that's an awful lot of mail to handle. That's just for the fourth division?

Person 2:

That's right, just for the fourth division.

Person 1:

I understand that you fellas in the fourth division post office are also handling the mail for the third and fifth divisions also in this operation.

Person 2:

That's right, it's—it has come to us, I suppose, because of our greater experience, I don't know.

Person 1:

Mm-hm. And how--how do you work there, do you process that mail for the other divisions too?

Person 2:

We, uh, separate it out at different, uh, divisions, we get it pouched to each separate division, we break it down that way.

Person 1:

Oh, I see, then all you actually sort out is the mail for your own fourth division?

Person 2:

As far as actual mail sorting goes, that's right.

Person 1:

Well, how many men do you have working in your post office?

Person 2:

We have, uh, ten men with us.

Person 1:

And how many of those are V-mail technicians?

Person 2:

Three.

Person 1:

Just three, and that leaves you seven to handle all this tremendous volume of mail.

Person 2:

That's right.

Person 1:

And that'll be a hundred and sixty three thousand pieces handled by seven men today.

Person 2:

Mm-hm.

Person 1:

Well, you certainly have done a marvelous job. And speaking of V-mail, we have a chief V-mail technician, tech sergeant Bill Stockner of Lowell, North Carolina. Uh, Bill, is, uh, V-mail—

(LOST)

Person 3:
...Couple days of V-mail...

Person 1:
How so? Why is that?

Person 3:
Well, uh, because mostly that's the only thing that we can get out, see. Our V-mail now is going out by press plane and that's the only mail going out now.

Person 1:
Yeah, you've processed that here in your post office?

Person 3:
Uh, we have a V-mail station set up here. We do process that, yeah.

Person 1:
In other words, all you send out from here, then, is the film?

Person 3:
That's right, the film.

Person 1:
How 'bout incoming mail? Does V-mail get priority coming in during an operation?

Person 3:
Well, we don't handle incoming mail here, that's handled in the rear echelon.

Person 1:
Oh, when you get it—it's all produced—all in the printed form?

Person 3:
That's right.

Person 1:
You have any, uh, idea of what percentage of, uh—or an approximate percentage of mail is V-mail going in and out of one of these operations? Going out, we'll say?

Person 3:
Going out—uh, let's see, V-mail is about... About ninety-nine percent.

Person 1:

That much?

Person 3:
That much.

Person 1:
I understand that even on, um—on, uh, ordinary air mail going out on one of these operations, the delivery isn't certain or, uh, sure of being rapid? How is that? Is it difficulties in transportation that—

Person 3:
Well, yes, I'd say that.

Person 1:
I imagine you have to wait until there's a boat going off the island to get to the nearest—

Person 3:
That's right, unless there's an airport that is opened up or something to get it off.

Person 1:
I see. And now we'd like to introduce the, uh, postal officer of the fourth marine division, who's responsible for setting up this system which he'll tell you more about. It's Captain Harding, Captain Emmett E. Harding, of 53 Patterson Avenue, in Hampstead, New York. Captain, s'pose you tell us something about this set up that you have, I think you've done a marvelous job in getting mail out to these men on Iwo Jima so many thousands of miles from home so quickly. How long did it take you to get your system set up?

Person 4:
Uh, we had our post office set up within twelve hours after we got ashore. It was functioning at that time. We also had a complete V-mail station set up and functioning.

Person 1:
How many months of preparation went into that, though?

Person 4:
Uh, I would say that, uh, the entire length of time we've been in the Pacific, since January '44 has gone into the preparation of that. We've built it up as

we've gone along, one operation teaches us a little bit more, and, uh, we gain from experience.

Person 1:

How long does it take now, under your set-up, as an average, for one of these V-mail letters getting off Iwo to get back to the States?

Person 4:

Well, I—I w—I should say it should be back to the processing station in the States within four or five days.

Person 1:

How about coming out, do you know about that?

Person 4:

Coming out would be approximately the same time.

Person 1:

Uh, suppose you tell us a little bit Captain if you can about, uh, how this mail set up has, uh, worked along the way, I know on the trip out here we had mail at the various stopping points.

Person 4:

Well, that is a system which we, uh, put into practice on this operation. It, uh, entails—uh—weeks of preparation and, uh, works, uh-- in this way: we leave part of our postal crew at an intermediate point, they receive all the mail for the division at that point, and separate it into rear echelon and forward echelon mail, they have a list of every man and the ship in which he comes out here on. They break down the mail to ships and send it forward to us pouched, to ships. All we have to do at any intermediate point is deliver the pouch to the ship and each man gets his mail within a matter of minutes once that mail is put aboard the ship. Uh, that process continues—uh--until we jump off from our last stopping place and we notify those people back at the intermediate point then, they discontinue breaking it to ships, and send it out to military units. That's how we get it here on Iwo.

Person 1:

Well, on the trip out, Captain, is the mail flown to the convoy?

Person 4:

Mail is flown so that it reaches our stopping point, several days before we reach there by ship.

Person 1:

I see. I've already asked these, ah, men about the number of, uh, of, uh, letters that have been handled in a day, how about second, third and fourth class mail, do you do any of that on these advanced combat posts?

Person 4:

No, no, we don't—uh, take care of, uh, anything but first class mail on an operation. We find that it's too bulky and transportation is at a premium, and there's no way of getting it out here. We save it at our rear echelon and deliver it to the boys when we go back.

Person 1:

Well, thanks a lot, Captain, for talking to us. There's one more thing I do want to ask you, and that is how these postal employees in the Marine Corps are selected? Are they former civil postal employees, or how do you work that?

Person 4:

Well, uh, many of them are former postal employees, I would say the majority of them...