

HOW JOHN WAYNE SAVED THE MARINES

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To celebrate the

birthday of a truly great American, let me tell you how John Wayne saved the Marine Corps. In the aftermath of World War II, the psychological letdown after years of war and bloodshed, the huge demobilization of servicemen, the desire to slash military spending, and the antipathy towards the military by left-wingers in the Democrat Party all combined in a call by a number of Senators and Congressmen to abolish the Marine Corps.

In this, they were supported by the Doolittle Board, created by the Truman Administration, which called for the Marine Corps to be “disbanded” as a separate military force, and “unified” with the Army (yes, the board was headed by an Army general, Jimmy Doolittle).

A group of enterprising Marines – you can always depend on Marines to be enterprising – with Hollywood connections thought a movie made around the most famous photograph of World War II, Joe Rosenthal’s of the Marines raising the flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, could help sway public opinion against their disbandment.

They approached legendary director Allan Dwan, who agreed to commission a script. The movie was to be called “The Sands of Iwo Jima,” and everybody agreed there was only one man who could play the lead role of Sergeant Stryker: John Wayne.

To their great surprise, Wayne turned it down. He didn’t like the script, and he wasn’t enamored of the character of Stryker. The Marines came to the rescue again. The Marine Corps Commandant, General Clifton B. Cates, got on an airplane and flew from Washington to California to personally request Wayne make the picture. When General Cates explained the stakes involved – the very existence of the Marine Corps – Wayne immediately changed his mind, promising the general he would do everything in his power to have the movie be a success.

The Sands of Iwo Jima was released in 1949 and quickly became a runaway blockbuster, with millions of moviegoers packing every theatre showing it. Wayne was nominated for a Best Actor Oscar, establishing him as

Hollywood's Number One box-office star. The Doolittle Board folded its tent, and no politician on Capitol Hill ever again said a word about disbanding the Marines.

So let's all say "Semper Fi" to the memory of John Wayne.

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