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PHOTO SPECIAL TO SUN/U.S. NAVY

This photo from the U.S. Navy archives shows the Sixth Fleet invasion during the Battle of Iwo Jima in World War II. Mt. Suribachi is shown in the background.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN/ PHAN LEE MCCASKILL, USN

This 2001 aerial photo shows Mt. Suribachi as it is today on the island of Iwo Jima.

Kayhart

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for radio technology never wavered.

One day, Kayhart spotted a news article which said that individuals with an interest in radio were wanted to join a U.S. Army Signal Corps training group.

"I just felt my country could use me better if I could get in the military and use my radio experience," he said.

So, in 1942, Kayhart enlisted with the U.S. Army Signal Corps. He was 31 years old at the time, and married, with a small child.

ARMY ENLISTMENT

His wife, Ann, was worried about his entering the military. But he tried to reassure her by saying, "Don't worry! I won't be sent overseas. I'm too old!"

Following his Army basic training, Kayhart received orders to report to Harvard University, where he was given a four-month course in graduate radio engineering as part of his Signal Corps training.

Then he received orders to report to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), where he studied radar technology for three months.

"This was highly secretive. I couldn't even tell my wife what I was doing," he said.

When he completed this course, he was a radar installation and maintenance officer.

Kayhart eventually found himself serving in Hawaii, where he installed radio and radar technology and equipment.

IWO JIMA

While in Hawaii, Kayhart was informed that he would be leading and supervising a mission to install radio transmitters on the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima — once U.S. forces were able to capture it.

He was instructed to select men to assist him and to get equipment and supplies ready to ship out.

After loading all of the needed equipment and supplies onto a ship, Kayhart said they sailed westward, eventually arriving at a coral island.

"We heard the radio on our ship talking about Iwo Jima ... Our forces had landed on Iwo Jima, and all hell was breaking loose."

Kayhart and his team of Signal Corpsmen watched as they waited offshore.

"We got up on the rails of the ship, and we watched all of the firing going on and the bombs going off," Kayhart said. "Fire was all over the place. Dust was filling the air.

"I looked at the main man on our ship and said, 'My God! Are we going in there tomorrow morning?!'

"Yes," the officer told him quietly.

Kayhart and his men eventually got word that the American flag had been raised on Mt. Suribachi, a key objective for the Marines.

"And that's when they sent us in," Kayhart said.

U.S. ARMY LT. CLIFF KAYHART
SERVED IN SIGNAL CORPS DURING WWII

SUN PHOTO BY LISA WARREN

Greene County Quilt Club member Donna Bernard reads a personal message to Cliff Kayhart stitched onto his Quilt of Valor.

SUN PHOTO BY LISA WARREN

World War II veteran Charles Clifford Kayhart, better known to his friends as "Cliff," is shown during his Quilt of Valor presentation in June. The 102-year-old U.S. Army Signal Corps veteran served as a radio and radar installation and maintenance officer, and was in charge of setting up the radio transmitting station on the Japanese-held island of Iwo Jima after the U.S. Marine Corps landing there.

SURVIVED 'A CLOSE SHAVE'

The next morning, Kayhart was among the G.I.s ordered onto a landing craft, which eventually landed at the base of Mt. Suribachi, a 546-foot-high dormant volcanic cone and the dominant geographical feature of the island.

From the vantage point of Mt. Suribachi, the Japanese defenders had been able to see U.S. artillery, especially those landing on the beaches.

The island was heavily forified at the time of the invasion, and the invading Marines suffered extremely high casualities.

After landing on the island, Kayhart said, "The first thing I did was have my men go out and dig their fox holes — which I did myself as well."

During their first night on the island, Kayhart and his men were burrowed in their foxholes.

At one point during that first night, he said, he heard "the pattering of feet" going around him.

"I was right on the edge of a cliff," he said.

"I thought it was strange because they had been told to never get up at night because we could be shot by our own people."

About 15 minutes later, a shot rang out near him.

Kayhart jumped up to find that his sergeant, a Texan, had just shot and killed a Japanese soldier — saving their lives. The enemy soldier had one grenade in his hand and another in his pocket.

"That was a close shave ... but we survived it," he said.

Shortly after arriving on Iwo Jima, Kayhart said, he and his men were ordered to begin work on the radio transmitter site.

"I said, 'General, there are Japs all around out there — I don't want to risk the lives of my men getting out there!'

"He said, 'Do it! Go out on the beach and load up all of your material!'"

The first thing Kayhart did then was load up on ammunition.

"I had the men go down and get all kinds of ammunition — hand grenades ... trip flares. I wanted to make sure that these guys were safe.

"We did that, and we picked up all of our equipment, our transmitters, wiring, cable and everything you need to build a station. We had a truck to do that ... but it had a big hole in it where the Japs had shot a cannon through the side of it."

Kayhart and his men eventually made it to their site.

"We got to work — even though there were still enemy soldiers around," Kayhart said. "When we landed, the island was one-third taken; there was two-thirds still not taken. So there was a lot of fighting still going on.

"We put all of the trip flares up, and I staged two men up on a little higher place towards the entrance of our transmitting area to stand guard at night. They shot a couple of Japs."

From there, Kayhart began assembling all of the transmitters.

"The men were out there running feed lines out to the antenna locations. We did that for two or three months, I guess. We finally got the transmitter built, got the antennas all installed, and everything tested fine," he said.

It took a couple of months to clear the island of Japanese forces, a delay which proved costly to the Americans in casualties, Kayhart said.

"This is why I worried so much about my own men," he explained.

"I was there for six months altogether," Kayhart said. "Finally my men got orders to leave back for headquarters in Hawaii."

Kayhart himself had to remain behind on the island for a bit longer — just to make certain that all of the radio transmitting equipment was working properly.

During the time that he was on Iwo Jima, an air strip was also built there by the Americans.

"The main reason for taking Iwo Jima, we had B-29s bombing Tokoyo, burning it up street by street. But they were flying all the way from Saipan," Kayhart explained.

"It was 740 miles from Saipan to Iwo Jima and another 700 miles from there to Tokko.a. These poor guys were flying all that distance and after dropping bombs and dodging Japanese planes ... all of the fighter planes that accompanied them took off from Iwo Jima. They didn't fly the whole distance," he said.

"It was finally a great joy to me to see all of the B-29s lined up on our beautiful airstrip on Iwo Jima. There were 400-500 at a time there," Kayhart said.

"We had everything we needed there ... great big tanks for gasoline. It looked like a good airport here in the States when they got done with it."

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

After six months on Iwo Jima, Kayhart finally received his orders to return to Hawaii.

But at the time of departure, the airstrip experienced an air raid warning because of an approaching unidentified plane.

"I said, 'That's impossible! We haven't had an air raid in three or four months here!'

"The plane had no IFF (Information Friend or Foe) so we didn't know what it was. Finally it appeared above us about 35,000 feet. It was a B-29," he recalled.

Later they learned that the mysterious B-29 flying overhead was the *Enola Gay*: the plane that was on its way to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Once Kayhart's plane was given the go-ahead to leave Iwo Jima, it landed in Saipan, where he initially thought he would be spending some time.

About 3 a.m., however, he was awakened and told that there had been a change of plans and they would be leaving immediately for Hawaii.

Kayhart was told that the U.S. had just dropped a bomb on Hiroshima.

"I said, 'My God! We've finally split the atom!"

The result of the bombing, and another at the city of Nagasaki, was the Japanese surrender and the end of World War II.

In 1946, Kayhart left the military as a captain and returned to civilian life.

He then went on to design an instrument for the federal government, and from there he joined The Magnavox Company in 1947 as the company's first field engineer.

His assigned territory was all of the U.S. east of Indiana and Ohio, and from Maine to Florida.

After serving in many positions, including as the company's first service training director, he was transferred to the Magnavox television manufacturing plant in Greeneville in 1957, and named the manager of a new department here called the Customer Acceptance Department.

He retired from Magnavox — which was by then Philips Consumer Electronics Co. — in 1976 and continues to make his home in Greeneville.

QUILT OF VALOR

In late June, Kayhart was honored for his service to his country in a war zone with a Quilt of Valor, presented to him by members of the Greene County Quilters Club.

Kayhart's daughters, Susan Mallini, of Lake Murray, S.C., and Pam Fyffe, of Atlanta, were both on hand for the presentation, along with his friends Gordon and Peggy Wigle, Dee Nelson and John Beagan.

Kayhart also has three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

He has one deceased son, Clipper Kayhart. His wife, Ann, died in 2006 at the age of 92. They had been happily married since 1937.

Like many of the "Greatest Generation," Kayhart remains humble about his service for his country during WWII.

"My story," he said, "is just about how one guy went to war and then came back. It is just one of 50 million others."