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enough range to escort the big Super Fortresses. Countless bombers were easy prey of Japanese interceptor air attacks. Iwo Jima, with its three airfields, was ideally located as a fighter escort station. It was also an ideal safe haven for crippled bombers returning from raids on Tokyo.

"It wasn't supposed to take very much time to take control of Iwo Jima," Johnson said. "Three days or no more than a week tops."

Three days turned into 35 before U.S. forces could claim control of the tiny island on March 26, 1945, Johnson said.

"We bombed Iwo Jima



Iwo Jima veterans Phil Gamache, left, a U.S. Marine, and Todd Kimsey, a member of the U.S. Navy, last week at Bear Meadows Grill. Photo/Charles Duncan

for 72 hours before attempting to go ashore," Johnson said. "It didn't do any good. All it did was make potholes in the airfields. The Japanese were in the hills.

"The Japanese had turned the island into an ant-hill," he said. "They had miles and miles of tunnels underground and in the hillside. All that bombing and we didn't touch a single Japanese soldier."

Johnson, who served in both the Pacific and Atlantic during World War II, said the Japanese were among the most disciplined military forces of all time.

"They fought to the death," Johnson said. "Before you even encountered the Japanese, you knew you were in for a fight."

The first three days after the Allied bombings on Iwo Jima were torture as well, said Johnson, who was aboard a Destroyer Escort.

Johnson stood helplessly as one U.S. Marine after the other dropped dead or wounded on the beach during the first three days of fighting ashore took place.

"It was horrible, they just couldn't get a foothold," Johnson, now, 92, remembered. "It breaks your heart to see your friends go down."

Gamache said that he lost his best friend in the battle. He still gets emotional when recalling the experience.

"I got through the whole thing luckily," said Gamache, who was a U.S. Marine corporal. "The experience on Iwo Jima helped me understand that your life is planned when you are born."

"I always wondered why I survived at Iwo Jima," Gamache said. "Seven years after the war, my brother died. His wife died before him."

"My wife and I took his five children in to raise with our three children," he said. "I'm a firm believer that I had another duty later in life as the reason I survived at Iwo Jima."

"I look back today, and I thank God that he saved my life," Gamache said. "I'm blessed to be with you here today to tell my story."

Kimsey, a member of the U.S. Navy during Iwo

Jima, said he got his education in the Pacific.

"I could stand here all night and tell stories," he said. "We live on memories. I wake up at night and sometimes those memories come back to me."

"You come to the realization that we all went through hell in that war," Kimsey said.

Iwo Jima was a bloody battle, 6,821 Americans died, 19,217 were wounded, and one U.S. Destroyer Escort was sunk.

Almost 19,000 Japanese soldiers died; only 216 were taken prisoner.

The battle was etched in our memory by Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the raising of the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi by five U.S. Marines and one U.S. Navy battlefield Corpsman.

The photograph records the second flag-raising on the mountain, both of which took place on the fifth day of the battle.

It's a photograph we should always remember, it's a battle we should never forget.

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out of committee by Day 30, or Cross-Over Day, that bill is dead for this session," Sen. Gooch said. "That's an important day for lawmakers."

Another important day for lawmakers is Day 40. For after this day, those seeking to return to office at the State Capitol can finally begin fundraising for campaigns.

"By law, we can't raise campaign funds while the legislature is still in session," Sen. Gooch said. "Our qualifying and primary dates have been moved to an earlier date to comply with federal election dates."

"We don't want to linger in session anyway, it costs taxpayers about \$80,000 for each day we're in session," Sen. Gooch said.

Qualifying for local, state and federal elections this year will be March 3-March 7.

The Primary Election date is set for May 20.

Sen. Gooch told constituents that the recession still has a hold on parts of Georgia. The good news is that the housing market is making a rebound in North Georgia, which is encouraging economic news for our area, Sen. Gooch said.

"Revenues are coming back," he said. "We're working hard to make Georgia a more attractive option for new business and industry to locate in Georgia."

One of those options is to eliminate the state income tax. However, that option won't happen any time soon.

"Roughly \$8 billion comes in from state income taxes," Sen. Gooch said.

Project...

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The project is expected to take 18 months to complete.

The facility will be 35,000 square feet, with an auditorium seating capacity of 986.

Other areas within the facility include a band classroom and practice rooms, a choral classroom and practice rooms, a drama classroom, a concessions/hospitality area, and a ticket sales area.

The project was part of last March's 1-cent ESPLOST sales tax extension vote, which was approved by voters with a 69 percent approval rating.

Construction can begin once all contractors are in place. That process begins with local contractors starting the bidding process.

"That's a huge portion of our state budget."

"We have to establish ways to offset that amount which isn't going to be easy," Sen. Gooch said. "I cosponsored legislation to eliminate state income taxes last year. But, it's going to take some time to make that happen."

"Obviously, we're los-

ing industry to neighboring states that have already eliminated state income taxes," Sen. Gooch said. "We just lost another major industry to Tennessee because of the state income tax issue."

"It's something that our state needs to address as we go forward," Sen. Gooch said.