



Sgt Louis Lowery

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Captured Leatherneck History on Film

By R. R. Keene

A lot is being made of the movie "Flags of Our Fathers," premiering in theaters this month. By all accounts, it is a faithful rendition of James Bradley and Ron Powers' best seller by the same name about Bradley's father, Navy Pharmacist Mate Second Class John H. Bradley, and the five Marines who raised the second flag over Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima.

It was Feb. 23, 1945, when Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal (see "In Memoriam," page 68) captured the moment on his Graflex Speed Graphic camera. Standing beside him was Sergeant William H. Genaust, a Marine motion-picture cameraman who had enough frames remaining on his film to record the event.

It is also a good time to remind readers that not only was *Leatherneck* magazine represented on Iwo Jima that day, but at 10:20 a.m., some two hours before Rosenthal's Pulitzer Prize-winning frame was recorded, *Leatherneck* combat photographer Sgt Louis R. Lowery shot photos

of the first flag raising while Marines were still under fire on the island.

Lou Lowery was a big, handsome fellow who, as a Marine, fit the stereotypical image of a sergeant hefting a rifle with all its warfighting accoutrements rather than focusing from behind a deceptively delicate and cumbersome piece of equipment designed to take photographs.

But Lowery had an eye for photos. He'd developed it in the National School of Photography, Washington, D.C., and honed it in his hometown as a photographer for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

For America, the first pictures of World War II were depressing images of the carnage at Pearl Harbor. The nation, and the Marine Corps in particular, needed combat correspondents and photographers almost as much as they needed riflemen.

Looking back, Lowery once remarked: "I almost joined the Navy. [They] offered to make me a chief. The Marine Corps promised to make me a sergeant after I graduated from recruit training. I went into the Marine Corps believing that a Ma-

rine sergeant was senior to a Navy chief."

Back in those days, *Leatherneck's* staff consisted of active-duty Marines. Lowery reported aboard and was promptly sent to the Pacific. Being with *Leatherneck* had some advantages: Lowery was relatively free to move where he needed, and *Leatherneck* equipped him with two cutting-edge Rolleiflex cameras. Less bulky than the standard issue Graflex camera of the 1930s with its 4-inch-by-5-inch sheet negatives, the Rolleiflex had 2¼-inch-by-2¼-inch rolled film with 12 exposures, making it quicker and easier to shoot and a lot easier to carry.

Lowery carried those cameras ashore, covering at various times all six Marine divisions in actions at Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Okinawa and Iwo Jima and getting himself wounded twice in the process.

Artist Andy Warhol once famously said, "In the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes." Lowery achieved his 15 minutes of fame on Iwo Jima. What is often overlooked or forgotten is that prior to the photo on Suribachi, Lowery had taken photographs of the battle that captured more of the horror and grit of war than the combined military photographers of today have taken of the fighting in Iraq.

But it was that mid-morning shot on a volcanic mountain that Lowery, like Rosenthal, is remembered for. He tripped the shutter and created the images of Platoon Sergeant Ernest "Boots" Thomas, Sgt Henry "Hank" Hansen, First Lieutenant Harold "George" Schrier, Private First Class James "Jim" Michels, Corporal Charles "Chuck" Lindberg and others of a reinforced 3d Platoon, Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment raising the flag over not only Iwo Jima but also Japanese soil for the first time.

It didn't just happen. At 9 a.m., 1stLt Schrier was told by Captain Dave Severance, his company commander, to lead a 40-Marine patrol up the 554-foot-high Mount Suribachi. They had to climb and crawl to the top. As they reached the

When asked for a photo, Lou Lowery would invariably autograph and forward this photo as his favorite. PFC Jim Michels is prominent on watch in the foreground. Over the years, Lowery became associated with this one shot while, in fact, he had taken numerous photos of the first flag raising.





SSgt Myers Cornelius, 5thMarDiv lab chief on Iwo, took this photo of Lowery examining one of his Rolleiflex cameras atop Mount Suribachi.

summit, Cpl Robert A. Leader and PFC Leo Rozek located a length of pipe. Leathernecks, including Schrier and Thomas, attached an American flag, 54 inches by 28 inches. Lowery knew a shot when he saw it.

Rosenthal, who over the years knew Lowery and considered him a good friend, once told a reporter: "There may have been some doubt about which of us was the better photographer, but there was no doubt about who was luckier."

But in his own way, Lowery was a very lucky man. As he finished photographing the flag raising, a Japanese soldier popped out of a cave and fired. PFC James A. Robeson cut the soldier down with a burst from his Browning Automatic Rifle. Lowery had survived every campaign he was in, wounded twice but alive, and nearly became a casualty after taking his famous photo. When the shooting started, Lowery jumped for cover.

Retired Marine Reserve Major Norm Hatch, who was the Fifth Marine Division photo officer at the time, recalled Lowery coming to him looking for assistance in repairing or replacing his cameras. Lowery told Hatch that when he jumped, he "misjudged the distance," jumped off a ledge and rolled 40 to 50 feet. Hatch noted: "Fortunately he wasn't badly hurt. His cameras, however, were another thing. One was damaged beyond repair and the other, though damaged, still worked. His film was not damaged."

Lowery's luck continued. After the war, he stayed with *Leatherneck* as the photo director. He also remained in the Marine Reserve and eventually retired as a captain.

In the interim he courted and won Doris, a classy blonde, who had studied dancing under Gene Kelly and could belt out just about any song you named. She also was the light of Lou's life.

He remained on the staff of *Leatherneck* and went on to be the photo director of the Marine Corps Association when it merged with the Leatherneck Association and began publishing *Leatherneck* magazine in 1976. He retired in 1982 and died in 1987 at the age of 70. Lowery is buried in Quantico National Cemetery.

His combat photos, however, are still being printed and shown. While you are watching and enjoying the movie "Flags of Our Fathers," take a moment to remember Sgt Lou Lowery.

