

The Flag Raisings On Iwo Jima

The first American flag was raised over Mt. Suribachi on February 23, 1945. It was photographed by SSgt Lou Lowery for *Leatherneck* magazine. Another flag went up a few hours later. It was photographed by Joe Rosenthal for the Associated Press. Had the second photo been posed? "Definitely not!"



1stLt Harold Schrier and PltSgt Ernest "Boots" Thomas of "E"/2/28 led the first flag raising patrol up Mt. Suribachi. Photographers hurried to the scene and three of them, Sgt William Genaust, AP's Joe Rosenthal and Pvt Bob Campbell, posed jubilantly beside the original flag before the second one was raised.

I here are many stories concerning the flag raisings at Iwo Jima. Some are fact; some are fiction. So many misconceptions....

Even the statue dedicated to the gallant Marines of World War II causes confusion at times. The memorial, erected in Arlington, Va., adjacent to the National Cemetery, is *not* the "Iwo Jima Memorial," but rather the "Marine Corps War Memorial."

February seems like a good month in which to set the record straight about the raising of the American flag atop Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, on February 23, 1945. Actually, there were two flag raisings that day.

The history of the World War II battle for Iwo Jima has been duly recorded. Many books have been written on the subject.

The landing took place early on the morning of February 19, 1945, after 72 consecutive days of bombing and shelling. The Fourth and Fifth Marine Divisions made the initial landing, followed two days later by the 21st Marine Regiment of the Third Marine Division. Days later, the rest of the Third Division, minus the 3rd Marine Regiment (floating reserve) went ashore.

This story is not intended to recount the entire battle for Iwo Jima. At the moment, we are primarily concerned with Mount Suribachi and flags.

An extinct volcano, Suribachi is 554 feet high and shaped like a World War I helmet. Japanese defenses in all directions were shrewd, and included concrete blockhouses, pillboxes and caves. Enemy guns from the mountain rained down steel slivers and shrapnel on the Marines.

After bitter fighting, the 28th Marines reached the base of Suribachi on the afternoon of February 21. By nightfall the following day, the 28th had surrounded the mountain and recon teams had found that there were no paths, roads or trails leading to the top. Naval gunfire and Navy and Marine pilots on bombing runs had erased all routes leading upward.

It was decided to send an assault patrol up the mountain. Selected to conduct the historic mission was the third platoon from "Easy" Company, 2nd Battalion. (Almost half of the platoon had been killed or wounded since the start of the Iwo operation, and Platoon Sergeant Ernest I. "Boots" Thomas was now the senior

enlisted man of the platoon's 25 survivors.) Rounding up reinforcements, the platoon grew to a strength of 40 Marines and prepared to "take the high ground..." The patrol would be led by 1stLt Harold G. Schrier.

LtCol Chandler W. Johnson, CO of the 2nd Battalion, had located an American flag, which he handed to Schrier. The flag came from the Navy attack transport *Missoula*.

The mission of the patrol?

Climb to the summit, secure the crater and raise the flag. Two other small patrols had reached the rim of the crater and had taken cover.

The Marines began their ascent. *Leatherneck* photographer Louis R. Lowery, then a staff sergeant, hooked up with the platoon as it moved out.

Cpl Harold P. Keller spotted an enemy soldier climbing out of a hole. Keller fired three rounds from the hip and the soldier disappeared. Then grenades began flying from various cave entrances and the Marines replied with grenades of their own.

Cpl Robert A. Leader and Pfc Leo Rozek located a length of pipe, to which Lt Schrier and PltSgt Thomas quickly attached the flag. They, along with Sgt Henry O. Hansen, Cpl Charles W. Lindberg, Pfc Louis Charlo and Pfc James Michels raised the first American flag atop Mount Suribachi.

Lowery photographed the flag raising and recalls hearing cheers from Marines down on the beach. But the battle was far from over.

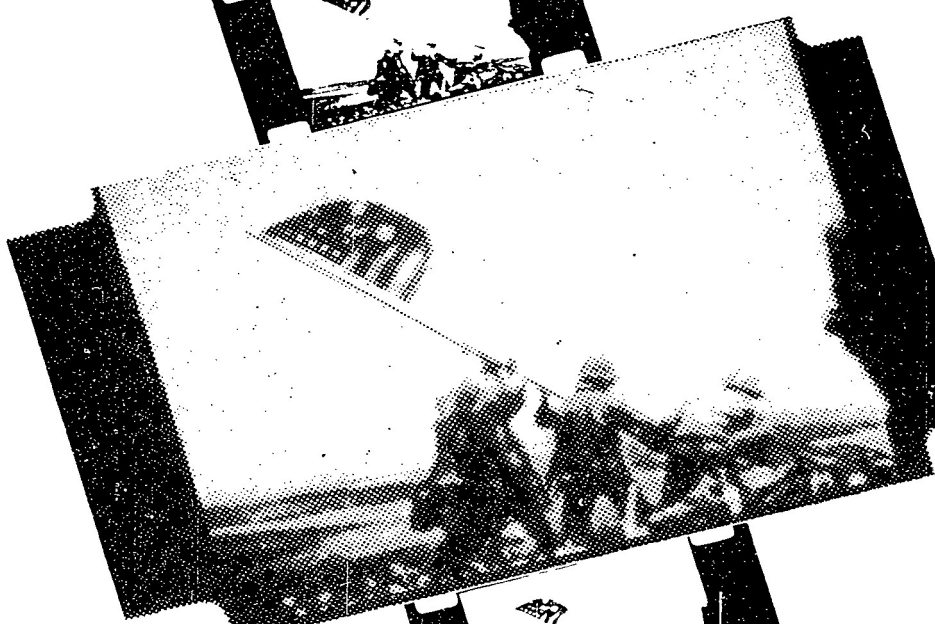
A Japanese soldier emerged from a cave and fired at Pfc James A. Robeson and Lowery. Robeson swung around with his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and let loose a burst. The enemy fell, but was quickly replaced by a sword-swinging Japanese officer. Many Marine rifles fired, and the officer dropped.

A Marine determined that the opening the Japanese had come from was a large cave that had several openings. Lowery was kneeling, preparing to take a picture of the Marines in action, when he saw a grenade bouncing toward him. He had little choice. He dove over the lip of the crater, tumbling and sliding for some 50 feet before he could grab onto some brush.

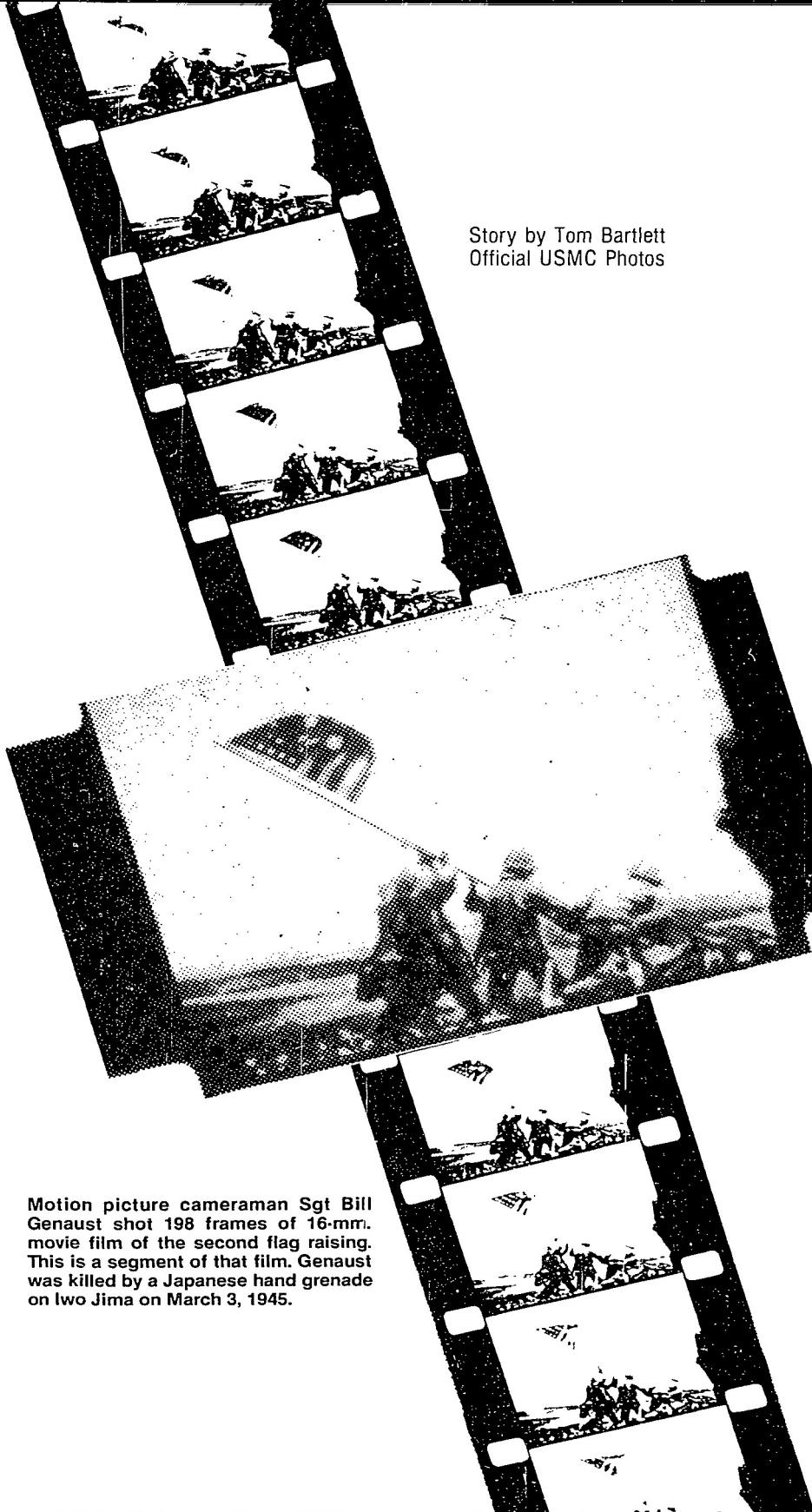
His camera was broken, but fortunately, his film of the first flag raising was undamaged.

As Lowery limped toward the beach, he met three other photographers—Joe Rosenthal, of the Associated Press, and Marine photographers Sgt Bill Genaust, a motion picture cameraman, and Pvt Bob Campbell, a still photographer.

Story by Tom Bartlett
Official USMC Photos



Motion picture cameraman Sgt Bill Genaust shot 198 frames of 16-mm. movie film of the second flag raising. This is a segment of that film. Genaust was killed by a Japanese hand grenade on Iwo Jima on March 3, 1945.





(ABOVE) SSgt Lou Lowery's photograph of the first Iwo flag raising almost cost him his life. (BELOW) Pfc Rene Gagnon and Pvt Ira Hayes described the second flag raising to BGen Robert L. Denig, then Director of the Division of Public Relations, HQMC.



"Rosenthal stopped me as I was heading toward the ship with my film," Lowery recalled. "He asked if anything was happening up on the mountain. I told him a small flag had been raised and there was talk that another patrol was taking off with a larger flag, (96 by 56 inches) to replace the first one.

"Rosenthal asked if I thought there was any use in his going up there. I told him I thought there were good shots to be had because you could see almost the whole beach, with a panorama of the ships and equipment below.

"He thanked me, and then kept on going..."

Reaching the top of Mount Suribachi, the three photographers took pictures as the Marines prepared to exchange the flags. Campbell, however, was the only one who recorded the actual switch. One of his photos shows the smaller flag coming down as the larger one was being raised.

The six men in Rosenthal's photograph, which was the model for the Marine Corps War Memorial, were:

Pfc Franklin Sousley, youngest of the six flag raisers. (He was 19 years, five months old). He was KIA on Iwo.

Cpl Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian, who survived Vella La Vella, Bougainville and Iwo Jima, only to die on the Indian reservation in Arizona on January 24, 1955.

Sgt Michael Strank, the eldest of the second group of flag raisers, was 25. He was KIA on Iwo. Strank was born on the Marine Corps' birthday in 1919.

John Bradley was a Navy Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class. He is still living.

Cpl Rene Gagnon was 19 years and 11 months old when he helped raise the second flag. He died in New Hampshire a few years ago.

Cpl Harlon Block, the sixth member of the group, was KIA on Iwo.

Some have written that Rosenthal's photograph, which won the Pulitzer Prize in photography, was "staged or posed," to which Marines who know reply "no way!"

First of all, Pvt Campbell's photo shows the smaller flag coming down and the larger one going up. It was a spontaneous thing. Genaust's movie footage also shows that there was no time for staging the event, and no hesitation on the part of the Marines—which there would have had to be for the benefit of the still photographer.

The controversy came about in the following manner. Rosenthal took his photos as the second flag went up. After he finished, he had one film exposure left

when he was asked if he would shoot a group photo.

As Rosenthal focused his camera, the grimy, unshaven Marines put their arms around each other's shoulders and turned on their victory grins. Afterwards, Rosenthal went aboard ship and asked that his film be sent back to the States for processing. In time, he received a phone call from a friend, congratulating him on his photography and asking, "Was the picture posed?"

Believing his friend to be asking about the final group shot, Rosenthal replied, "Certainly!" And that's how the rumor about the "posed" flag raising began.

"I'm often asked if Joe's (Rosenthal) shot was faked," Lowery said. "No. It wasn't. And I'm asked if there is any animosity between Joe and me. I mean, because I took the first flag raising photo and he took the second, and because his photo won a Pulitzer Prize and was made into a famous statue and a United States postage stamp.

"Joe and I are very good friends. He always gives me credit for being the first. And I always give him credit for having the better photo."

Lowery reported to *Leatherneck* magazine as a private in 1943. He and his camera went ashore at Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. As a result of Lowery's photo, a monument was dedicated to PltSgt Ernest "Boots" Thomas and other Marines of the 3rd Platoon, "E"/28, who raised the first flag on Iwo. The monument stands in Monticello, Fla., the hometown of Thomas.

Retired Marine Maj Harrold A. Weinberger was the Noncommissioned Officer in Charge of the Fourth Marine Division's photo section on Iwo Jima. Today he says, "It irritates and shocks me when I hear or read that Joe Rosenthal asked the Marines to 'recreate' the flag raising. That statement is an insult to Rosenthal. Joe is a decent, honest and honorable man. He is a modest gentleman who deserves his honors and fame, and he wears his laurels well."

When Rosenthal, Genaust and Campbell reached the summit of Mount Suribachi, and the second flag was being prepared to replace the first, all three photographers shot the scene. "Genaust stood elbow to elbow with Rosenthal on the mountain. There positively was no staging or reenactment," Weinberger states emphatically.

"Genaust's film was originally shot in 16-mm. Kodachrome, a reversal film," the major recalls. "His footage was used in two Marine training films that I am aware of—'To The Shores of Iwo Jima,' and 'Objective Prisoners.'"



Photo by Lou Lowery

Lowery photographed Schrier's patrol as they prepared to raise the first flag atop Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima. Patrol members shown were (left to right) 1stLt Harold Schrier, PltSgt Ernest Thomas, Sgt Henry Hansen and Cpl Charles Lindberg.

Weinberger photographed segments of both movies, for which he received a National Headliners Award for his camera artistry on Iwo Jima.

Genaust did not receive recognition. He was killed on that volcanic island.

Nearly twice as old as most of the Marines who fought on Iwo Jima, Genaust was 38 when he was killed by enemy fire. He had gone into a cave, used by the Japanese as a command center, to photograph it. An enemy soldier, hidden in the darkness, realized he had been discovered. He lunged forward, pulled a grenade and hurled it at Genaust, who died immediately from the explosion.

Genaust had been decorated earlier, however. At Saipan (1944), he had set aside his movie camera, picked up a rifle, and helped two other Marines destroy nine Japanese snipers hiding under a hut.

Recently, at the urging of Maj Weinberger, the Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association sponsored a resolution, seconded by Lou Lowery, recognizing the achievements of Sgt William Genaust posthumously.

"The Genaust movie film, 198 frames in all, has been used countless times throughout the years in official Marine Corps films, commercial feature movies (including 'Sands of Iwo Jima,' starring John Wayne as Sgt Stryker), newsreels, documentaries and TV programs and se-

quences," Weinberger explained. "For many years, television broadcasters throughout the land used Genaust's footage as their sign-off each night."

At Weinberger's suggestion, General Paul X. Kelley, Commandant of the Marine Corps, recently issued a Letter of Appreciation to Mrs. Adelaide Dobbins, Genaust's widow. The letter was presented by Robert A. Suhosky, National President of the Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association.

During a recent convention, the Los Angeles Chapter of the MCCCC honored Iwo photographers (Rosenthal, Genaust and Lowery) with plaques. Joe Rosenthal, now 73, was present, as was retired Maj Weinberger, now 84.

Following World War II, Bob Campbell was released from the Marine Corps and went to work, along with Rosenthal, on the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Campbell died in 1968 and Rosenthal retired from the California paper in 1981. Lou Lowery retired as Photo Director of *Leatherneck* magazine in 1982.

Sgt William Genaust was killed on Iwo Jima on March 4, 1945; Platoon Sgt "Boots" Thomas was killed in action on March 3, 1945. In all, 5,931 Marines lost their lives on Iwo. Nearly 20,000 were wounded.

The Marine Corps War Memorial is a tribute to them all....

