

Two Flags

Story by
Norm Hatch

It was Feb. 23, 1945. Iwo Jima! Marines struggled out of their fox-holes after surviving a night of intermittent shelling. Mount Suribachi loomed over them like an evil presence. For four

days naval gunfire, attack from the air and Marine artillery had constantly, almost at point-blank range, pummeled this dormant volcano so it appeared that there could be no survivors.

One question remained: Had they eliminated the Japanese observers who had efficiently directed Japanese artillery on Marines operating in the Motoyama Airfield Number 1 area and the shore parties on the beach unloading much needed supplies of food, water and ammunition?

A patrol had to be sent to the summit of Suribachi to ensure that all Japanese resistance on the mountain had ceased and the area was secure.

As this day progressed, there would be several groups of Marines destined to participate in an event that would

become the symbol to the world of Marine heroism in the Pacific war—the raising of Old Glory on the crest of Mount Suribachi.

The legend of First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier and his patrol's ascent of the mountain has been told often. Fortunately, he was accompanied by one of the Marine Corps' best still photographers, Technical Sergeant Louis Lowery of *Leatherneck* magazine, who documented the ascent, firefights and the first flag raising about 1030. As the first Americans to gain the summit, there was considerable danger, and for Lou it was doubly so because he aimed a camera and not a rifle.

There was jubilation among the troops and ships at sea to see our flag waving defiantly over Suribachi. However, Major General Keller E. Rockey, commanding general of the Fifth Marine Division, determined that the first flag was not large enough to be seen from all points on the island. The appearance of the flag had been such a morale booster to the troops he felt that a larger flag should replace the first one. This decision was made about noon of the 23rd.

I was the photographic officer of the Fifth Division, responsible for all photo efforts within the division field of operation. I also worked with the public information officer in providing assistance to pictorial media, still and newsreel. At noon on the 23rd, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Roll, the division D-2, advised that the general had ordered a larger flag installed on Mount Suribachi. It would take place in about two hours. His purpose in telling me was to have me order several photographers to document this event because, as he explained, this was to be the "official" flag raising for the island. It would also establish that Suribachi was secure and no longer a threat.

I advised Eugene "Wonderful" Smith of *Life* magazine and several other media photographers who were in the vicinity of my CP of the coming event. As it turned out, the only civilian press photographer to go up the mountain was Joe Rosenthal.

I ordered Staff Sergeant William H. Genaust, motion picture cameraman, and Private First Class Robert R. Campbell, still photographer, to cover the event. I suggested that they make haste as the photo CP was at the edge of Motoyama Airfield #1, and there was considerable distance to the top of Suribachi. Somewhere along the way



The raising of the first flag on Mount Suribachi was photographed by *Leatherneck* photographer Lou Lowery. A curious series of events would cause the spread of the false rumor that the famous second flag-raising photo was "staged."

they met up with Rosenthal, and this trio was on its way into the history books.

Bill Genaust was no stranger to combat, having served in the Guam/Saipan campaign with the Fourth Division and, as a result, was recommended for the Navy Cross for helping a unit survive night *banzai* attacks. (He received the Bronze Star.) He was a welcome addition to my photo unit as only three of the 30 of us had been in combat.

Campbell was a competent photographer, who had been on the staff of one of the large San Francisco papers prior to his entry into the Corps. He was older than the rest of the troops and photographically experienced.

There was additional emphasis on getting good photography. Following the first flag raising, a Japanese threw a hand grenade out of a cave at the Marines who had put up the flag. Everyone, Lou Lowery included, ran to find cover, and Lou, in doing so, jumped off a small cliff which propelled him down the mountainside in a tumbling motion.

When he regained his balance, he saw that one camera was damaged and the other one didn't look healthy. He came to my CP to see if I would lend him a camera. Unfortunately, I didn't have an extra. At this stage, no one knew if Lou's photos of the first flag raising had survived the fall. On one camera, the body was bent enough so that light leaks were possible which would have fogged the film.

On the second one, there appeared to be lens damage, making the camera unusable. Lou sent his film out with the press boat that night, but he did not learn for about 10 days if his film had survived. All still-photo film, military or civilian, of Iwo was being processed at Guam as there was complete censorship in the Pacific Theater.

Once the film was processed and cleared, a debate occurred between Navy and Marine Corps public information officers. The question was how to handle the release of film representing two separate flag raisings on Mount Suribachi on the same day. Upon viewing the photos from Rosenthal, Lowery and Campbell, there was no contest as to who had obtained the most graphic and pictorially outstanding flag photo of the Pacific war. Consequently, Rosenthal's photo was sent by "wire photo" to the United States, and Lowery's photos of the ascent and first flag raising were sent by air to the Division of Public Relations, Headquarters, U.S.

Marine Corps.

This decision, although probably correct, was a major factor that led to the confusing stories that persisted for the next 50 years concerning the two flag raisings.

Three Marine divisions, more than 70,000 Marines, and crews of 600 ships were involved in this battle. Consequently, there was considerable home-front interest in what was happening on this distant bastion of the Japanese Empire.

You can imagine the impact upon a greatly concerned public when they opened their papers to find, filling most front pages, Joe Rosenthal's stirring and inspirational photo of "the" flag raising on Mount Suribachi.

As the mystique of the photo grew,

that little word "the" became the second major problem to dog the photo through the years.

When the Iwo operation was in planning stages, the photo and press officers of all organizations involved, land, sea and air, met in Hawaii for a detailed discussion on coverage. This effort was headed by Lieutenant Commander John McClain and Lt Dave Hopkins. McClain had been with the *New York Post* or *Daily News* as entertainment editor, and Dave was the son of President Roosevelt's closest advisor, Harry Hopkins.

In all the previous Pacific engagements, little or no coordinated effort, at a senior command level, ensured specific assignments would be accomplished or that duplicate photo coverage, both still and motion, would be held to a



Joe Rosenthal's magnificent shot of the second flag going up is quite likely the most famous war photograph ever taken. Given the circumstances, it was an amazing achievement by Rosenthal.



PFC Robert Campbell captured this photo as the two flags were being exchanged. This excellent photograph and the motion picture footage by SSGt William Genaust clearly demonstrate that there was no posing of Joe Rosenthal's picture.

minimum. In addition, plans were laid for the quick pickup of military and press photography for delivery on a daily basis. By the same token, once press information via radio and wire services was available from the States, that information would be passed immediately to the troops. That also was a first.

In addition, several photo officers were designated as couriers to carry back motion picture film directly to Washington at certain intervals. Lt Herbert Schlosberg, Fourth Division, left first, and I left on March 8, arriving in Washington about the 15th.

The first news we had on Iwo about the flag raising came in the form of a radio broadcast telling about this great photo that had been taken by AP photographer Joe Rosenthal of "the" flag raising on Iwo Jima. Understand that none of us had seen the photo, so we didn't know exactly what they were talking about. Joe thought it was the photo he took after the flag raising when the men grouped around the base of the pole in a typical *banzai* photo like many that had been taken in other Pacific battles. In later conversation Joe said that the flag had gone up so fast that he had been concerned that the several shots he had taken might have had movement in them.

Now the controversy starts. Shortly after the radio broadcast, we began receiving press clippings of the reporting being done by the press of the battle. There, bigger than life, were copies of the front pages of newspapers filled with the Rosenthal photo.

Any casual observer reading the stories that accompanied the photo would not have been aware that there had been a previous flag raising and that Rosenthal's photo was a second.

Combat correspondent TSgt Keyes Beech had reported the complete story of the first flag raising which was picked up by AP and carried worldwide. In addition, there was a direct radio broadcast from the command ship back to the United States which featured a member of the patrol, Platoon Sergeant Ernest I. Thomas' account of the ascent and the first flag raising.

The public adoration and lack of clarification did not initially rest well with Lou Lowery. It was difficult for him to

understand why this second flag raising was getting all the attention when he and a Marine patrol had put their lives on the line to secure the top of the mountain and his photos were not being used to illustrate that fact.

The more Lou thought about this situation the more he became convinced that somehow his photography had not been given the special handling it deserved due to its historical impor-

dance. He was concerned that the CINC-PAC public relations staff had favored servicing press material ahead of similar military stories and photos.

He and many other professionals, upon seeing the photo, felt that it had been staged, posed or arranged in some manner. It was just *too* good a photo not to have been posed. Later on, when the

dust had settled, Lou recognized the artistic and public impact the photo had. At no time did he harbor any ill will toward Joe Rosenthal.

Lou discussed the problem with Bob Sherrod, who was the senior *Time* correspondent in the Pacific. Bob had covered the Marines at Tarawa and the Marianas. Bob felt that Lou's story had some validity, so he wrote a short piece trying to outline the difference between

the two flag raisings and the importance of the public understanding how dangerous it was to accomplish the first one. He stated in his dispatch concerning the second flag raising that "the planting of the flag didn't quite happen that way and the historical picture was a post facto rehearsal."

One other factor entered the picture about this time. Joe Rosenthal had left Iwo, aboard ship, headed for Guam and Pearl Harbor. He was asked by reporters, before he had seen his classic photo, if it had been posed. Joe said he had posed one photo, the one with the group at the base of the flagpole.

That one admission of a posed photo, the decision at Guam to mail Lowery's photos to the United States, Lowery's disappointment which led to Sherrod's article and a propensity for many professionals to think that the Rosenthal photo was staged has tainted the history of the photo for all these years. Correspondents, feature writers and authors continue to propagate misinformation on the flag raisings.

On March 8, after being on Iwo for 18 days, I had orders to proceed to Pearl Harbor, Washington and Hollywood. I was to take with me all the motion picture film that had been exposed by the three Marine divisions and all the ships. I left by air, arriving in Guam just in time to catch a flight to Pearl on a C-54. On arrival in Pearl I received a new set of orders to Washington.

On arriving in Washington, I planned to check in at headquarters, go home, get a good shower and sleep. Was I surprised! Waiting for me with a staff car was LtCol Ed Hagenah, the deputy director of public relations. Fortunately, I had known the colonel in earlier days when I worked in Navy public relations.

I asked what was so important that a lieutenant colonel was sent to pick up a



Courtesy of Norm Hatch

Above: WO Norm Hatch, photo officer for the 5thMarDiv on Iwo, with 1st Lt Herb Schlosberg, the 4thMarDiv's photo officer

Below: Hatch and his assistant, WO Obie Newcomb



Courtesy of Norm Hatch



This shot, taken by PFC Campbell, after the exchange of flags, shows Joe Rosenthal photographing the men who participated. It was obviously "posed" and would contribute to the misunderstanding concerning Rosenthal's earlier photo of the flag raising.

rumpled, unshaven and very tired warrant officer. His response was that General Vandegrift wanted to see me immediately.

Ed said, "Get in the car. I'll explain on the way." He told me of the controversy over the two flag raisings and that there was sufficient confusion in the press, at headquarters and with the public in general that something had to be done to straighten it all out.

Feeling greatly self-conscious striding the halls of headquarters in my rumpled uniform, I really did not want to see the CMC looking the way I did. However, as Ed and I entered the outer office we were ushered directly into Gen Vandegrift's presence.

He was very gracious in greeting me, completely ignoring my appearance, and introducing the other people in the

room. They were Allen Dibble, the Washington representative for *Time*, and Alan J. Gould, a senior executive of the Associated Press in New York. Once again I was fortunate in knowing one of the players. Allen Dibble had been assigned to the "March of Time," a newsreel company operating under the *Time* banner, as a writer/producer during the period of time I had been there in training.

The general explained that controversy had arisen over the two flag raisings. It appeared that *Time* and AP had conflicting reports on what actually happened. I was the first person from Iwo who had some knowledge of the event with whom they would have the opportunity to talk. The CMC asked that I bring them up-to-date on what had transpired out there.

It was apparent from his questioning that little word "the" was once again raising its ugly head. The end result in the public's mind was that the flag-raising photo by Joe Rosenthal was the one and only flag raising.

Bob Sherrod's article, which *Time* had shown to AP, but had not printed, and an inadvertent *Time* radio broadcast of Bob's story on WJZ, New York, had fostered considerable tension between the two media giants. The Marine Corps, in the person of the Commandant, was caught between the two as they had come to his office to get the straight story.

I thanked my lucky stars that I had the presence of mind to convince Col Roll to let me take a copy of the D-2 journal with me. I thought that it would be essential for me to have when editing the

film in Hollywood in order to keep combat film actions in their proper time frame. For the uninitiated, the journal was a minute-by-minute description of the activities of the commands within the division's control. By having this running account of the battle, I did not have to rely on my recollections, but could verify any point that was in dispute.

I read from the journal the accounts of the two flag raisings, and this left no doubt in the minds of those listening what had transpired. This brings us back to that pernicious word "the" again. It was evident that the Rosenthal photo was the second of two flag raisings.

Gould suggested that in future AP releases they not refer to Joe Rosenthal's photo as "the" flag raising on Suribachi and would acknowledge, if asked, that it was the second flag raising. Allen Dibble said that *Time* would kill Sherrod's story and put out a correction to the radio release.

One more small problem needed to be resolved. Gen Vandegrift said that so much public acclaim had been attached to the photo that he thought it could be very helpful for various Marine Corps purposes. He asked Gould if AP would grant the Marine Corps permission to use the photo as long as they credited it to AP. Gould replied in the affirmative, however, stating that even if we used a duplicate negative, supplied by AP, we would be charged \$1 per print made.

This was not an unusual request to be made by a commercial photographic organization as the sale of their photo stock is a major source of revenue. However, one could sense some vibes circulating amongst the military in the room. After all, Iwo Jima had cost a tremendous loss of life, and I am sure in the minds of the Marines was the thought that if we hadn't taken the island there would not have been a flag-raising picture to take.

Gen Vandegrift broke the silence and said, "Gunner, what do you think of this?" I told the CMC that the motion picture film taken by SSgt Genaust was 16-mm. color and that even though the image was very small there was always one frame in each scene that could be relied upon to be sharp.

I suggested that if the Corps did not want to pay for the use of the AP photo we could enlarge the 16-mm. film and put out our own color prints as well as black and white. This was a bluff on my part and a serious calculated risk because at the time of the meeting I had not been in touch with Lt Schlosberg,

who had the Genaust film in Hollywood, so I did not know if Genaust's film was even usable. Had I been wrong, my career in the Corps would have been changed irrevocably.

Had we released our own photo of the flag raising, it would not have been credited to AP. I think this thought went through Gould's mind plus the fact he knew as well as I did that an enlargement from 16-mm. to an 8x10 print would be of inferior quality to the photo that Joe Rosenthal had taken. The thought of having two identical Iwo flag-raising pictures out in the public arena, one good—the other not so good, troubled him, so he made a quick decision to donate copy negatives to the Marine Corps to use at no cost, in perpetuity. (We did make some B&W copies from the color, but were not satisfied with them. The color enlargements did not look too bad, and they were used from time to time.)

Gen Vandegrift thanked me and arranged for a car to take me home to my waiting and very pregnant wife.

What now seems like a blip on the radar of time may not even appear to be comprehensible, as a subject, to many of today's readers. However, for the past 50 years there have been so many misunderstandings, statements and articles produced about this glorious photograph I thought that it was an important endeavor to pinpoint for Marines the simple facts of the case.

One last interesting note: For nearly all of these years it was not generally known that a fourth photographer was on Mount Suribachi with Rosenthal, Genaust and Campbell. He was Corporal Louis R. Burmeister, a still photographer, who I had assigned to cover the 28th Regiment for the course of the battle. He had learned of the impending flag raising and decided that it was something that he should cover for the records of the 28th.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of that largest of Marine Pacific battles, Iwo Jima. I am sure that none of those Marines who participated in the two flag-raising episodes could have envisioned how continuously prominent in the nation's conscience their actions of Feb. 23, 1945, would remain.

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