

Confirming the First Flag Raisers

The Huly Panel Reconvenes

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After confirming the identity of the Marines who raised the second flag on Mount Suribachi, General Robert B. Neller, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, ordered a similar review of the first flag raising in order to confirm the identities of and honor those who embodied the tenacity and bravery of all of the Marines who fought on Iwo Jima. "Our history is important, and we owe it to our Marines and their families to ensure it is as accurate as possible. After we reviewed the second flag raising and found inconsistencies, we wanted to take another look at the first flag raising to make sure we had it correct," said Gen Neller.

Previously, the official Marine Corps record listed First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, Platoon Sergeant Ernest I. Thomas Jr., Sgt Henry O. Hansen, Corporal Charles W. Lindberg, Private First Class Louis C. Charlo and PFC James R. Michels as the Marines who raised the first flag.

On July 5, 2016, the Huly Panel—previously tasked with determining the identities of those photographed raising the second flag—reconvened and began investigating the lesser known, but in many ways more important, initial flag raising on Feb. 23, 1945. The panel reviewed photographs, historical documents and eyewitness statements. Numerous claims have been made over the years as to the identities of the Marines raising the first flag, but in many cases, individual claims were in direct conflict with official records. The panel benefitted from knowledge gained in its previous sessions and the efforts of historians, authors and other experts over the years.

Raising the Flag

Early in the morning of Feb. 23, 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Chandler W. Johnson, the commanding officer of Second Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment, ordered that a route reconnaissance be conducted up Mount Suribachi in order to determine the presence of enemy forces. Marines from Company F were chosen for the task, and Sergeant Sherman B. Watson, Corporal George Mercer, Private First Class Theodore White and PFC Louis C. Charlo set out. They reported the absence of enemy forces, so LtCol Johnson ordered the executive officer of Co E, Lt Schrier, to lead a patrol to secure the top of Mount Suribachi and



From left: Cpl Charles W. Lindberg, Sgt Howard M. Snyder, PhM2c John H. Bradley, Pvt Phillip L. Ward, PltSgt Ernest I. Thomas, Sgt Henry O. Hansen, PFC Raymond E. Jacobs and, kneeling with his back to the photographer, 1stLt Harold G. Schrier, after the first flag was raised atop Mount Suribachi. Jacobs operated the radio, and Snyder provided security during the flag raising.

raise the American flag. A flag was provided by First Lieutenant G. Greeley Wells, the battalion adjutant.

Marines from 3d Platoon, E/2/28 made up the majority of Schrier's patrol, but other 2/28 Marines also participated. Staff Sergeant Louis R. Lowery, a *Leatherneck* photographer assigned to the 5th Marine Division, accompanied the patrol. His photographs of the flag raising provided critical evidence as to the identity of the flag raisers and others present on Mount Suribachi. As Schrier's patrol made its way up the mountain, they passed the initial reconnaissance team returning to the beach. Upon reaching the summit, Marines from Schrier's patrol dispersed to provide security while others scouted the area for an appropriate place to put the flag. Two Marines—LCpl Robert A. Leader and PFC Leo J. Rozek—found a piece of pipe which served as the flagstaff. Lt Schrier and four other Marines (PltSgt Thomas, Sgt Hansen, Cpl Lindberg and Private Philip L. Ward) worked to attach the flag to the makeshift pole while SSgt Lowery photographed their efforts.

After firmly securing the flag to the pipe, the Marines selected



Members of the patrol work to secure the flag to a pipe, which served as the flagpoles prior to moving the flag to a location from which it would be more visible.



In addition to the Marines and corpsman made famous in both flag raisings, numerous other Marines and Sailors made their way to the summit of Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945.

a high-visibility location and carried the flag to the designated site. Photographic evidence shows the same five Marines were either touching the flagpole or within its reach. And there was one more person with them—Pharmacist's Mate Second Class John H. "Doc" Bradley.

The flag was raised at approximately 1030. However, no photographs exist of the actual flag raising. SSgt Lowery was present, but he was in the process of reloading his camera when the flag went up. And unlike the second flag raising a few hours later, no one filmed the first flag's elevation over the bloody mountain. Sgt William H. Genaust, who captured most of the second flag raising on film, had not made it up the mountain at that time.

After reloading his camera, Lowery was able to capture photos immediately after the flag was raised, showing PltSgt Thomas, Sgt Hansen, PhM2c Bradley and Pvt Ward in direct contact with the flagpole. Other Marines in the immediate vicinity, as shown in the photos, were Cpl Raymond E. Jacobs, the radio operator, Sgt Howard M. Snyder, PFC Michels, PFC Harold H. Schultz and PFC James A. Robeson, all of whom provided security throughout the flag raising.

Who Else Was on Suribachi?

The commander of Co F, 2/28, Capt Arthur H. Naylor Jr., also brought a patrol up to the summit in order to reinforce the Marines already there. His patrol arrived after the first flag raising but before the second one. Official records do not identify the members of Capt Naylor's patrol.

A chaplain also made the climb up the mountain between the flag raisings. Navy Lieutenant Charles F.

Suver, and his assistant, Sgt James E. Fisk, are seen in photos at the summit prior to the second flag raising. Evidence exists that LT Suver even celebrated Mass at the time.

Additional evidence confirms that even more Marines and at least one civilian made the ascent after the first flag raising. In

addition to the group who raised the second flag (Sgt Michael Strank, Cpl Harlon H. Block, PFC Rene A. Gagnon, PFC Ira H. Hayes and PFC Franklin R. Sousley—the sixth flag raiser, PFC Harold Schultz, was a member of Lt Schrier's patrol and had been on the summit since before the first flag raising) and Joe Rosenthal, Associated Press photographer, evidence shows that Sgt Genaust, Sgt Sherman B. Watson, PFC Louis R. Burmeister, PFC George Burns, PFC Louis C. Charlo, PFC John R. Thurman, PFC Theodore White, and Pvt Robert R. Campbell also were present.

Correcting the Official Record

Originally, the official Headquarters Marine Corps records included PFC Charlo and PFC Michels as flag raisers. While both were present on Mount Suribachi, no evidence exists to indicate that they raised the flag. PFC Charlo was a member

of the initial reconnaissance team who left the summit before anyone else arrived, and while he later returned between the flag raisings and provided security, he was not present for the first event. Similarly, PFC Michels also provided security, and despite his close proximity to the flag in a Lowery photo, no evidence exists that shows him touching the flag at any time during the raising.

Based on the Huly panel's conclusion, the official Marine Corps historical record will now reflect that the following Marines and Sailor raised the first flag on Iwo Jima on Feb. 23, 1945: 1stLt Harold G. Schrier, PltSgt Ernest I. Thomas, Jr., Sgt Henry O. Hansen, PhM2c John H. Bradley, Cpl Charles W. Lindberg and Pvt Philip L. Ward. It is somehow

fitting that Sgt Hansen and Doc Bradley, whose names were removed from the list of second flag raisers, helped raise what those fighting on Iwo Jima considered to be the more important flag.

**"Marines on the ground, still engaged in combat, raised a spontaneous yell when they saw the flag. Screaming and cheering so loud and prolonged that we could hear it quite clearly on top of Suribachi."
—Cpl Raymond E. Jacobs**

