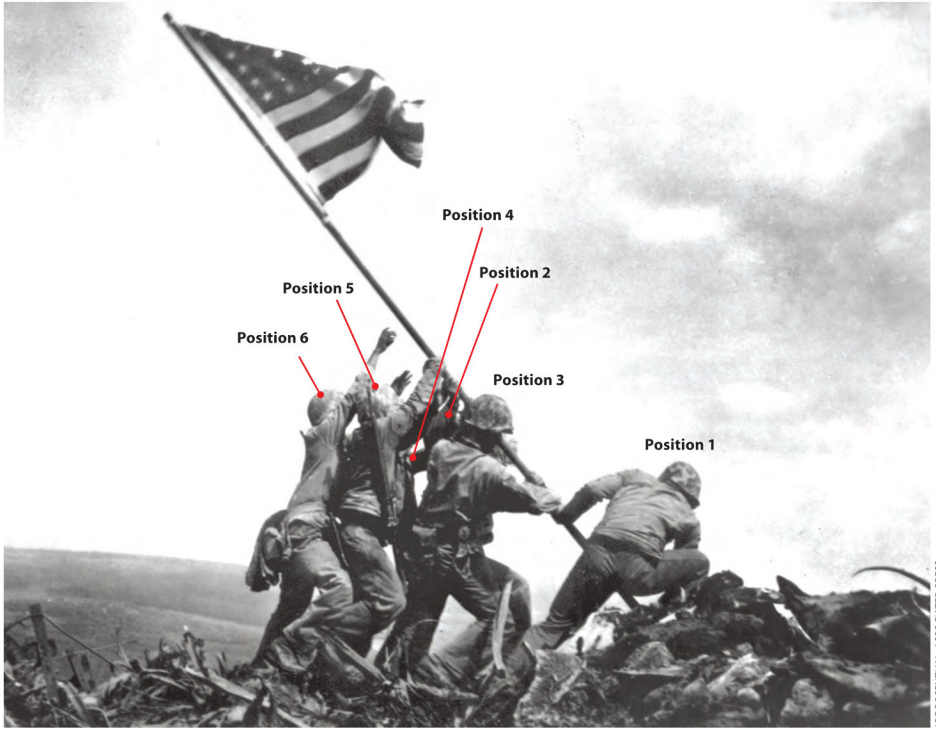


Examining the Evidence

USMC Reviews Iwo Jima Flag-Raising Photo



JOE ROSENTHAL ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Col Mary H. Reinwald, USMC (Ret)

A simple click of a camera's shutter, and a small moment in Marine Corps history is preserved.

Just one moment in the millions during the incredible battle for the small island of Iwo Jima. Circumstances, however, made this moment very different; the photograph took on a life of its own, and its subjects were immortalized. The time, place and dire straits in which the free world found itself contributed to the popularity of the photograph. The country, after several years in a cataclysmic two-front war, was desperate for something positive. The photograph embodied so much for the American people. The men in the picture, regardless of what else they

had done on Iwo Jima or in other battles throughout the Pacific, were viewed as heroes not just for raising a flag, but for raising the spirits of a nation.

But what if the men weren't who we thought they were? What if a mistake, however inadvertent, was made?

On Nov. 23, 2014, the *Omaha World-Herald* published a story entitled "New Mystery Arises From Iconic Iwo Jima Image." The story detailed the efforts of two history buffs, Stephen Foley and Eric Krelle, to prove that Pharmacist's Mate Second Class John H. Bradley, the corpsman who was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions in the initial days of fighting during the Battle of Iwo Jima, is not in Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph of the flag raising on Feb. 23, 1945, as

had been believed for almost 70 years. They presented substantial evidence that a mistake may have been made, and other media outlets began to express interest. The Marine Corps was notified of the new evidence, and after an initial review, a decision was made to do a more thorough analysis.

At the direction of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert B. Neller, a panel was convened to "accurately identify and appropriately credit" the flag raisers seen in the Rosenthal photo. On April 22, 2016, the panel, made up of both active-duty and retired Marines, as well as civilian historians, assembled at the General Alfred M. Gray Marine Corps Research Center at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., to review the newly dis-

covered evidence and existing photographs, eyewitness statements, and a film shot during the flag raisings. The results of the board and its recommendations were briefed to Gen Neller on May 4, 2016.

Lieutenant General Jan C. Huly, USMC (Ret), a former Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies and Operations, served as president of the panel.

Background

U.S. forces landed on Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945, and four long days later, the commanding officer of 2d Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Chandler W. Johnson, sent a patrol to secure Mount Suribachi. Sergeant Henry O. Hansen and PhM2c John H. Bradley were part of the patrol headed by First Lieutenant Harold G. Schrier, the executive officer of Company E. Private First Class Harold H. Schultz also was a member of the patrol. An American flag was raised that morning at approximately 1020. Staff Sergeant Louis R. "Lou" Lowery, photographer for *Leatherneck*, captured the first flag raising on film, and it is clear that PhM2c Bradley participated in the first flag raising.

A few hours later, a resupply patrol, tasked with replacing the first flag with a larger one, was sent to the top of Suribachi. Sgt Michael Strank, Corporal Harlon H. Block, PFC Ira H. Hayes and PFC Franklin R. Sousley were members of the resupply patrol; Joe Rosenthal, an Associated Press photographer, joined them as they made their way up the mountain. Sgt William H. Genaust and PFC Robert R. Campbell, Fifth Marine Division combat correspondents, also accompanied the patrol.

The second flag was raised at approximately 1220 as the first flag was lowered. Sgt Genaust filmed the preparation and raising of the second flag, but there is a break of undetermined length in his film between the flag raisers holding the flag in a horizontal position and later starting to lift the flag. PFC Campbell photographed the first flag as it was lowered. Joe Rosenthal photographed the second flag raising, and one of his shots became the iconic photo.

The fighting on Iwo Jima took a huge toll on the Marines involved in the second flag raising. Both Cpl Block and Sgt Strank were killed in action on March 1, as was Sgt Hansen. PhM2c Bradley was wounded on March 12 and evacuated the next day. PFC Sousley was killed on March 21.

When Rosenthal's photograph was sent back to the States, the sensation it created led to a decision to bring the flag raisers home to take part in a war bond



PFC ROBERT CAMPBELL USMC

The raising of the second, larger flag was tightly synchronized with the lowering of the first flag so Marines throughout the island did not think the Japanese had retaken Mount Suribachi. Lt Harold G. Schrier, patrol leader, later stated that he was so focused on the first flag going down that he did not see the second flag go up.

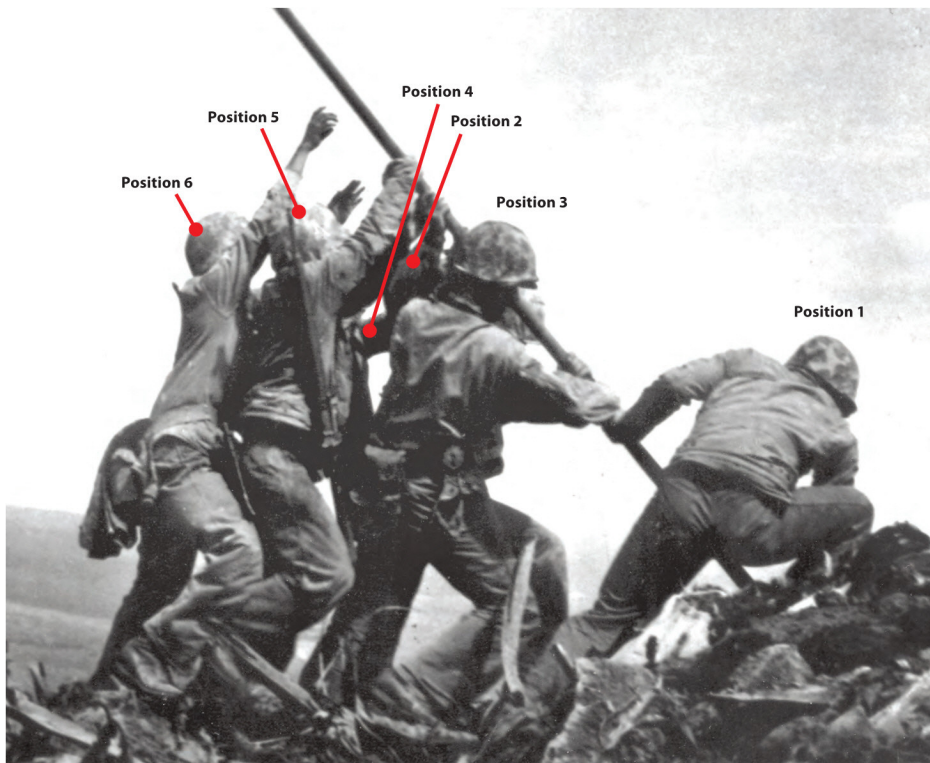


At the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the flag raisers who survived the battle were brought back to Washington, D.C., to participate in the 7th War Bond Tour.

tour. PFC Rene A. Gagnon returned to the United States in April 1945 and identified the flag raisers as Sgt Hansen, PhM2c Bradley, Sgt Strank, PFC Sousley, PFC Hayes and himself. Bradley and Hayes also were brought to Washington, D.C., that month, and they confirmed Gagnon's identification of the flag raisers.

In July 1946, however, in response to a letter from the mother of PFC Harlon Block, Ira Hayes admitted that Block, not Hansen, was the Marine in Position #1 in the Rosenthal photo. A board was convened at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps in December 1946 with Major General Pedro A. del Valle as the president tasked with determining the participants of the flag raising, specifically the individual in Position #1, as depicted in the Rosenthal photo.

The del Valle board released its findings in January 1947. The opinion of the board was that Cpl Harlon H. Block (Position #1), PFC Rene A. Gagnon (Position #2), PhM2c John H. Bradley (Position #3), Sgt Michael Strank (Position #4), PFC



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Franklin R. Sousley (Position #5) and PFC Ira H. Hayes (Position #6) raised the second flag on Mount Suribachi. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alexander A. Vandegrift, approved the board's results.

The Huly Panel

The Huly panel reviewed the results of the del Valle board, scrutinizing each individual in the Rosenthal photo, in keeping with the Commandant's direction. The results of the Huly panel, however, differed from the results of the board from 70 years ago.

Position #1: Cpl Harlon Block. No new evidence or recent allegations contradicted Block being the man in Position #1. A comparison of photos taken by Joe Rosenthal throughout the actual flag raising with the film shot by Sgt Genaust shows the person in Position #1 with equipment and a facial profile consistent with Block. Coupled with Hayes' identification of Block as a flag raiser in 1946 and confirmation by the del Valle board,

no evidence suggests that Block is not the Marine in Position #1.

Position #2: PFC Rene A. Gagnon. Similar to Block's identification, no new evidence has called into question Gagnon's identification as the second flag raiser. Upon his return to the States in 1945, Gagnon identified himself as the Marine in Position #2; this identification was later corroborated by both Bradley and Hayes. Although his face is obscured throughout most of the film and photographs, a brief glimpse appears to be Gagnon, and the gear he wore in other clearly identifiable photos is consistent with the gear worn by the Marine in Position #2. As did the del Valle board, the Huly panel continues to believe that Gagnon helped to raise the second flag.

Position #3: PhM2c John Bradley to PFC Franklin Sousley. In addition to Gagnon's initial identification of Bradley as the individual in Position #3, Bradley himself confirmed this according to a memo to the Director, Division of Public Information, Headquarters, U.S. Marine

Corps dated Sept. 24, 1946, from LtCol E.R. Hagenah, USMC, written for the del Valle board. In his own letter to Gen del Valle, dated Dec. 26, 1946, Bradley stated, "I was on top of the hill already and when the flag was raised I just jumped up and gave the group a hand." In a letter to the same board dated 16 Dec. 1946, the Co E commander, Captain Dave Severance, also agreed that, to the best of his knowledge, Bradley was one of the flag raisers. The photographic evidence, however, does not support this.

As seen in both the Genaust film and other photographs taken atop Mount Suribachi, the individual in Position #3 is wearing an empty canteen cover, cartridge belt without suspenders, wire cutters, and a soft cover under his helmet; he is not carrying a rifle nor wearing a field jacket. Additionally, his trousers are not cuffed.

The Suribachi photographs, including Rosenthal's famous "Gung Ho" photo, also show Bradley without an empty canteen cover, wire cutters, or a soft cover under his helmet. The photos do show



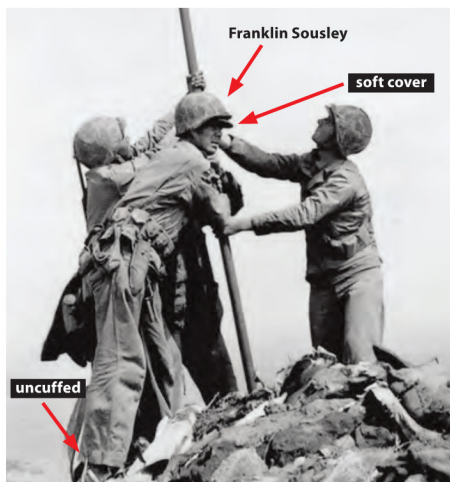
SGT LOUIS R. LOWERY, USMC

The field jacket, medical kits, leggings and uncuffed trousers of PFM2c Bradley, left, are clearly evident in this photo taken just after the first flag raising.

Bradley wearing a field jacket, with two medical unit 3s, a first aid pack, a K-bar, a full canteen cover and suspenders evident. Additionally, his trousers are cuffed, and he is wearing leggings.

If Bradley is not in Position #3, then who is? Surprisingly, determining the individual in Position #3 was relatively easy after closely analyzing photographs for specific equipment and gear. PFC Sousley, originally identified as the Marine in Position #5, is seen in photographs atop Suribachi wearing an empty canteen cover, a cartridge belt without suspenders, wire cutters, and a soft cover under his helmet. He is not seen wearing a field jacket, and his trousers are not cuffed—his gear is identical to the gear worn by the individual in Position #3. In addition, there is a moment in the Genaust film and in a Rosenthal photo where the face of the individual is seen briefly. The individual resembles Sousley. In the Huly panel's opinion, Sousley was in Position #3, not Position #5, in Rosenthal's photo.

Position #4: Sgt Michael Strank. As was the case with Block and Gagnon, no new evidence was discovered to call into question Strank's participation in the second flag raising. Although the del Valle board determined that the individual in Position #4 was Sgt Strank, the Huly panel worked to confirm this since Position #4 was the most obscured in both the photo and the film. But it was both the film and the Rosenthal photos that once again



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PFC Sousley, pictured here in the left foreground, is wearing equipment identical to the equipment worn by the individual in Position #3 of the second flag raising—uncuffed trousers, soft cover under helmet, wire cutters and empty canteen cover.

helped to confirm what was already known.

The Huly panel, after thorough review, ruled out the possibility that the obscured individual in Position #4 could have been Bradley. The individual in Position #4 is not wearing medical unit 3s or any of the other gear that Bradley was. Before the break in the Genaust film, it appears #4 was wearing a soft cover; after the break, however, the individual appears to be wearing a hard cover. The clarity of the film is such that it is not absolute, but one thing is certain based on other photographic evidence—Bradley only wore a helmet. Strank, however, is seen wearing a soft cover beneath his helmet in several photographs.

In addition, in the Genaust film, the ring finger on the left hand of the individual

in Position #4 is evident; the finger is bare. Photos clearly identifiable as Strank show that he was not wearing a ring on that finger. Bradley's left hand, however, clearly shows a ring on his ring finger in photos.

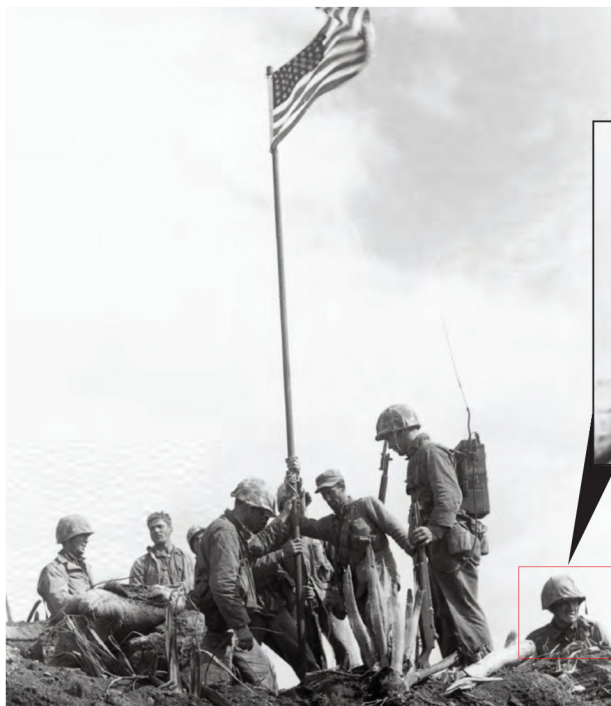
Position #5: PFC Franklin Sousley to PFC Harold Schultz. But if Sousley is in Position #3, who's in Position #5? The equipment, or lack thereof, indicates that it can't be Bradley. Again, Genaust's film and the photos taken by Lowery, Campbell and Rosenthal were thoroughly reviewed and a key piece of evidence helped to greatly simplify the identity—a broken helmet liner strap.

Only one Marine photographed on that fateful day on Mount Suribachi had a broken helmet liner strap hanging from



SGT WILLIAM H. GENAUST, USMC

In this still image from Sgt William H. Genaust's film, the Marine from Position #5 is shown walking away from the second flag. The hanging helmet liner strap and rifle sling mark the man as PFC Harold Schultz.



PFC Schultz is clearly visible in photos from the first flag raising. The helmet liner strap and distinctive rifle sling were instrumental in correcting the identity of the Marine in Position #5 as PFC Schultz.



Questions Remain

While the Huly panel's results may be correct, further forensic analysis is needed, and given today's technology, entirely possible. Gen Neller has directed that such analysis be conducted in the hopes that the flag raisers' identities can be confirmed with as much certainty as possible.

Regardless of the outcome, other questions remain. Why weren't the flag raisers identified clearly from the beginning? Why did John Bradley, Ira Hayes and Rene Gagnon identify Bradley as the individual in Position #3? Why didn't Hayes or even Bradley correct the record when the Hansen-Block mistake came to light in 1946? Why did it take well into the 21st century for someone to conduct a forensic analysis of the photo? Why did no one notice the absence of a corpsman's gear on anyone depicted in the photograph and the memorial? And perhaps most puzzling, why did Schultz never say anything?

Seventy years later, and with few survivors left who served on Iwo Jima, the questions may never be completely answered, but there are some plausible explanations as to why a mistake of this magnitude was made.

First, and perhaps most importantly, no one at the time could have anticipated the impact of that one photo. Even Rosenthal initially had no idea what he had captured.

In addition, to everyone present on Mount Suribachi that day, the second flag raising was not necessarily memorable. When the first flag was raised, shouts and celebrations were heard from the Marines on the beach as ships in the surrounding waters sounded their horns. Little attention



Harold Schultz

the left side of his helmet, and that was PFC Harold H. Schultz, another member of Co E. And, as importantly, the individual in Position #5 had a distinctive rifle. The sling of #5's rifle was attached to the stacking swivel—not to the upper hand guard sling swivel as was appropriate. Again, photos show that the only Marine with his sling attached in that manner was PFC Schultz.

However, and so very puzzling, no previous identification or claim that PFC Schultz was a flag raiser has ever been found.

Position #6: PFC Hayes. The easiest of all to identify. In addition to Gagnon and Bradley identifying Hayes from the beginning, Hayes himself admitted that he was a flag raiser, and the photographic evidence strongly supports these claims.



JOE ROSENTHAL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joe Rosenthal's other famous picture, the "Gung Ho" photo, was a key piece of evidence used to assist in identifying flag raisers and their equipment.

was paid to the second flag as it went up. Even Lt Schrier, the patrol leader, wasn't looking. In his own words, "At the time the picture was taken, I was busy taking down the original flag, and cannot definitely identify any member [of the second flag raising]."

A third significant factor adding to the confusion surrounding the identities is that the battle for the island of Iwo Jima raged for weeks after the flag raising. The flag went up and the Marines continued the fight. And the fight was a costly one; by the time Iwo Jima was secured, 5,931 Marines had been killed in action and another 17,372 were wounded. The dead included four of the Marines identified as flag raisers (Strank, Sousley, Block and Hansen). Bradley was among the seriously wounded; only Gagnon and Hayes emerged from their time on Iwo Jima physically unscathed.

And there may have been another reason, one that creates a disturbing picture of

what happened when the surviving flag raisers returned to Washington, D.C. From the letter Ira Hayes wrote to Harlon Block's mother in 1946: "I tried my darndest to stay overseas but couldn't, all because they had a man in there that really wasn't, and beside [sic] that had Sousley and myself switched around. And when I did arrive in Washington, D.C. I tried to set things right but some colonel told me to not say another word as two men were dead, meaning Harlon and Hansen. And besides the public knew who was who in the picture at the time I didn't want no last minute commotion." After the initial identification was made, right or wrong, were the remaining three under pressure not to make waves?

Perhaps the biggest mystery of all, if it is PFC Harold Schultz in Position #5 as the evidence indicates, why didn't he ever say anything? There is no record of any claims made or even any letters he may have sent saying he was a flag raiser. From

what little is known about him, Schultz was a solitary man both in the Corps and in civilian life. He didn't marry until he was in his 60s and, even then, only briefly mentioned the flag raising to his new family. After Schultz died, his stepdaughter found a copy of Rosenthal's "Gung Ho" photograph in his desk drawer. Schultz had written his name and the names of other Marines on the back. He made no mention of the flag raising.

Ironically, the significance of Rosenthal's photo and the Marine Corps War Memorial that it inspired is not who raised the flag, but rather who and what they represented. While the desire to correct the historical record is both understandable and necessary, that moment on top of Mount Suribachi more than 70 years ago will still hold a special place in the hearts of Marines and in the history of the Corps, regardless of who raised the flag.

