



# Unraveling the Mysteries Of the First Flag Raising

Photographs Shed New Light About First Flag Raising  
Atop Mount Suribachi

Story by Dustin Spence · Photos by Sgt Louis R. Lowery

**W**ith the upcoming release of the Clint Eastwood-directed movie “Flags of Our Fathers,” based on the book of the same name by James Bradley with Ron Powers, there is a renewed interest in the Battle of Iwo Jima and that momentous raising of the flag atop Mount Suribachi in what was arguably the most bloody and brutal of all the island campaigns of the Pacific War. But the flag raising made famous by Pulitzer Prize-winning Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, who passed away this August [see pg. 68], was actually the second flag raised that day.

The initial flag raising occurred some two hours earlier. At this point, only one of those Marines, clearly identified by history as among the first flag raisers, remains alive: former Corporal Charles W. “Chuck” Lindberg. While the identities of many of the men in 3d Platoon (Reinforced), Company E, 2d Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment involved in the patrol that raised the first flag have been previously lost to history, renewed research has yielded new insights into the correct names of those leathernecks. It’s time that those who can be identified are recognized for their individual efforts.

*Leatherneck* magazine photographer Sergeant Louis R. "Lou" Lowery accompanied the "Easy" Co patrol that scaled the mountain and raised that first flag. He is widely credited with taking the photographs of the first flag raising; however, over the years, one of his photographs has gained prominence over the others. That photograph, from one perspective or angle, made identification of those involved in that initial flag raising very difficult. With the publication of all known Lowery negatives together in one *Leatherneck* article in 2002, individuals who originally could not be seen clearly, now *can* be seen.

Lowery, being a skilled and experienced combat photographer with several of the earlier island battles under his belt, certainly recognized a historical moment. His photos show that he moved around the action to capture the tying of the flag to a pipe and the actual erecting of the flag and then the patrol leader, First Lieutenant Harold "George" Schrier, reporting the raising of the flag to his battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Chandler W. Johnson.

Over the past few years, I have become intensely interested in identifying as many of those in the Lowery photographs as possible. I have interviewed the Easy Co commander, now retired Colonel Dave E. Severance; the former platoon leader for 3d Plt, John K. Wells; former Cpl Lindberg, the assault squad leader, 3d Plt; former Private Philip L. "Phil" Ward, assault squad member, and many of his family members; former Private First Class Raymond "Ray" Jacobs, Co F, 2/28 radioman who was attached to 3d Plt; and many historians.

### 1-American Flag Being Tied to Metal Pipe

In this first photograph, Lou Lowery has captured the Marines tying the American flag to a piece of Japanese water pipe. Helping tie the American flag to the metal pipe are: Cpl Chuck Lindberg, top, left side of the pipe; Sgt Henry "Hank" Hansen, adjacent to Lindberg, with no helmet covering; 1stLt George Schrier, across from Lindberg; Platoon Sergeant Ernest "Boots" Thomas, right foreground cradling his rifle; and Pvt Phil Ward, barely visible, holding onto the pipe.

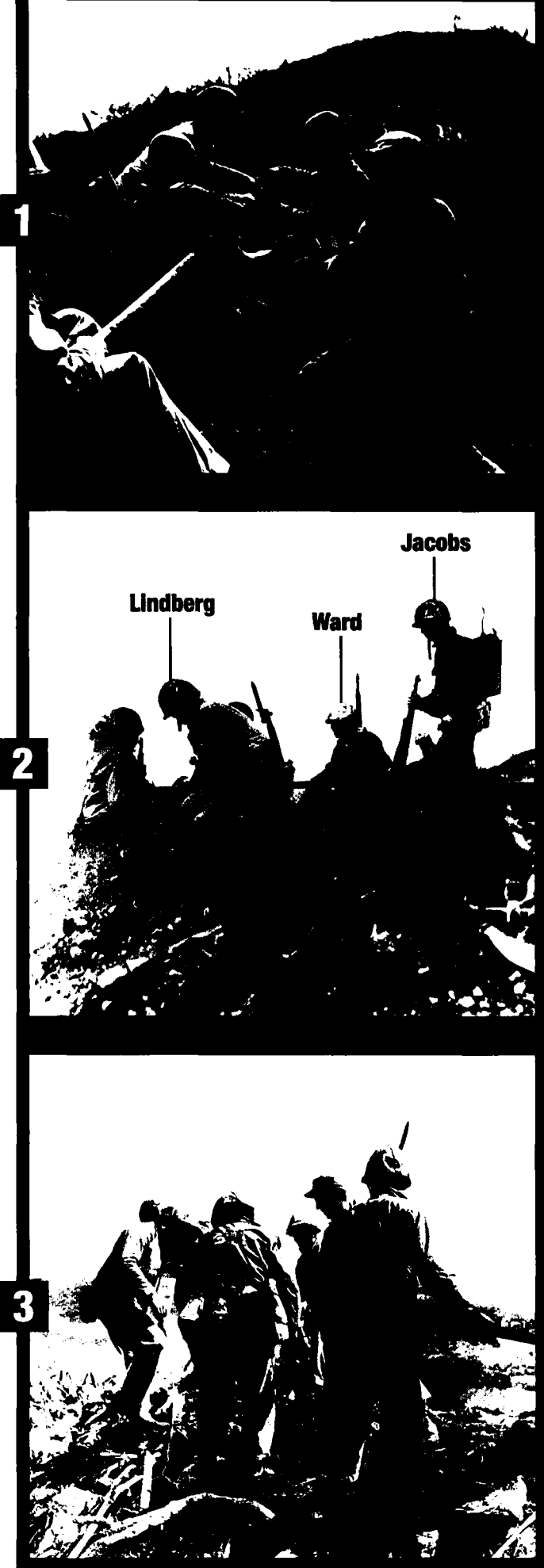
### 2-American Flag Being Tied to Metal Pipe—Another Aspect

Lowery accompanied the Marines as they moved the flagpole nearer the summit and captured another aspect of the Marines tying the flag to the pipe. Here some of the Marines are more clearly visible and additional Marines are in view. From this angle, we see Lindberg at the top, left side of the pipe; Schrier to Lindberg's left, looking away; PltSgt Thomas just to the left of Schrier, with his helmet only barely visible; Hansen, with only the top of his bare helmet visible; Pvt Ward, more clearly visible with his right hand on the pipe and holding his rifle in his left hand; an unidentified Marine in the distance with his head turned; and radioman PFC Ray Jacobs looking on.

### 3-American Flag About to Be Raised

The Marines remain in their same positions around the pipe, but they have been joined by Pharmacist Mate Second Class John H. "Doc" Bradley. Together they are preparing to plant the first American flag atop Mt. Suribachi. The flagpole has been lifted off the ground, and Lindberg is kicking a hole in the soil where the base of the pipe will be planted.

Schrier is behind Lindberg from this angle, with only the top of his helmet visible. Doc Bradley, one of his two large canvas medical pouches clearly visible under each arm, is to Lindberg's right. To the right of Bradley, and on the other side of the pipe, are Boots Thomas and Hank Hansen, who is wearing his soft cover, with an M1 rifle with a fixed bayonet visible. The Marine holding the metal pole on the far right, as in the previous two photographs, is Phil Ward.

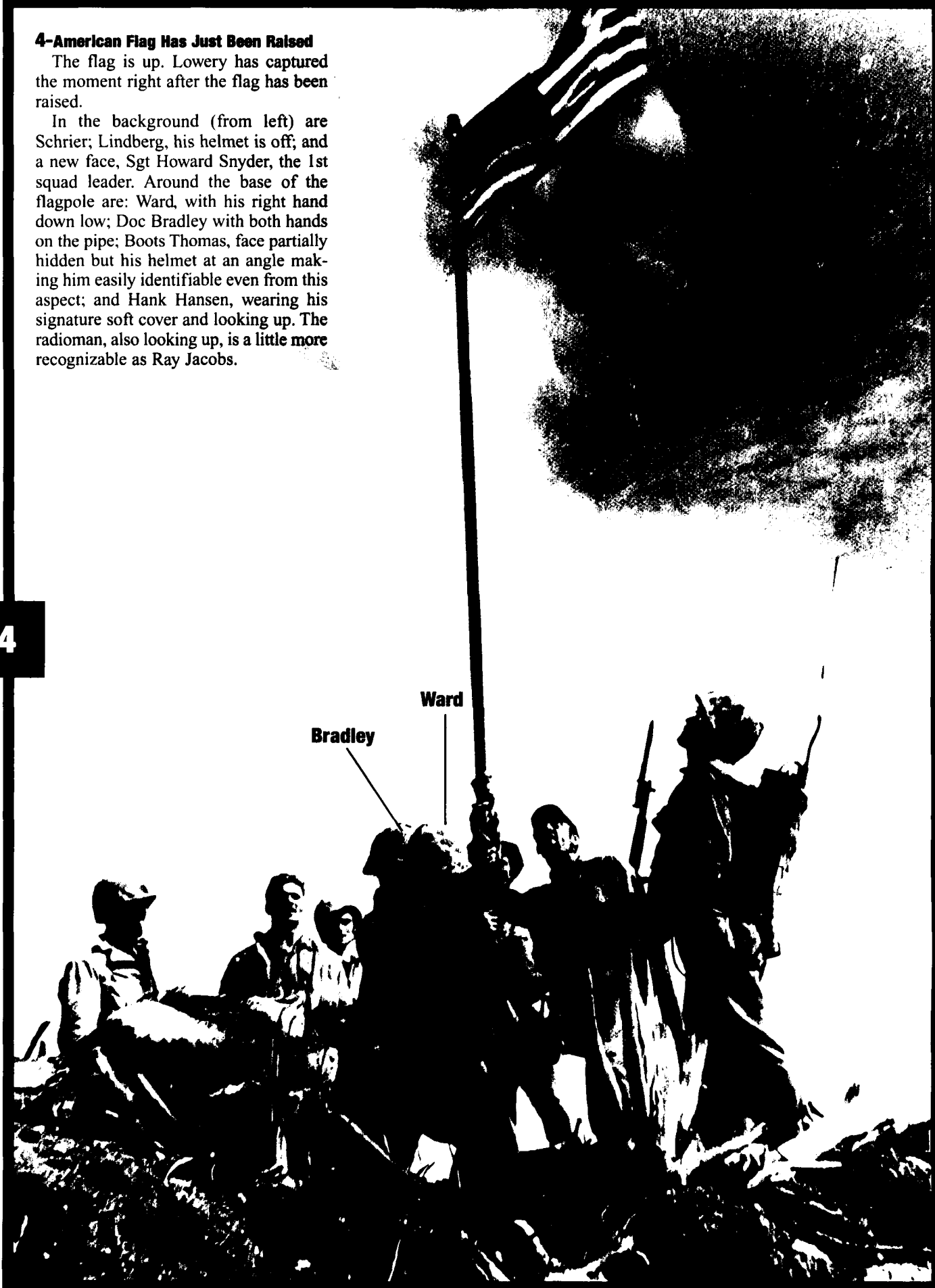


#### 4-American Flag Has Just Been Raised

The flag is up. Lowery has captured the moment right after the flag has been raised.

In the background (from left) are Schrier; Lindberg, his helmet is off; and a new face, Sgt Howard Snyder, the 1st squad leader. Around the base of the flagpole are: Ward, with his right hand down low; Doc Bradley with both hands on the pipe; Boots Thomas, face partially hidden but his helmet at an angle making him easily identifiable even from this aspect; and Hank Hansen, wearing his signature soft cover and looking up. The radioman, also looking up, is a little more recognizable as Ray Jacobs.

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### 5-Flagpole Being Secured In Ground

The flagpole has just been jammed into the ground, but it is still unsteady. The Marines are helping secure it by pushing the pipe deeper and deeper, kicking dirt and jamming rocks around the base of it. In the background from the left are Schrier, Lindberg and Snyder. Around the base of the flagpole (from left) are Ward; Doc Bradley, apparently shoving the pipe down is barely visible but with one of his medical kits on his left hip and his medical bracelet clearly visible; Boots Thomas, behind the pipe; and Hansen, looking down. The radioman looking at the base of the flagpole is PFC Jacobs, while the Marine on the extreme right is PFC Harold Schultz, who was not a member of 3d Plt; however, he was a member of Easy Co.

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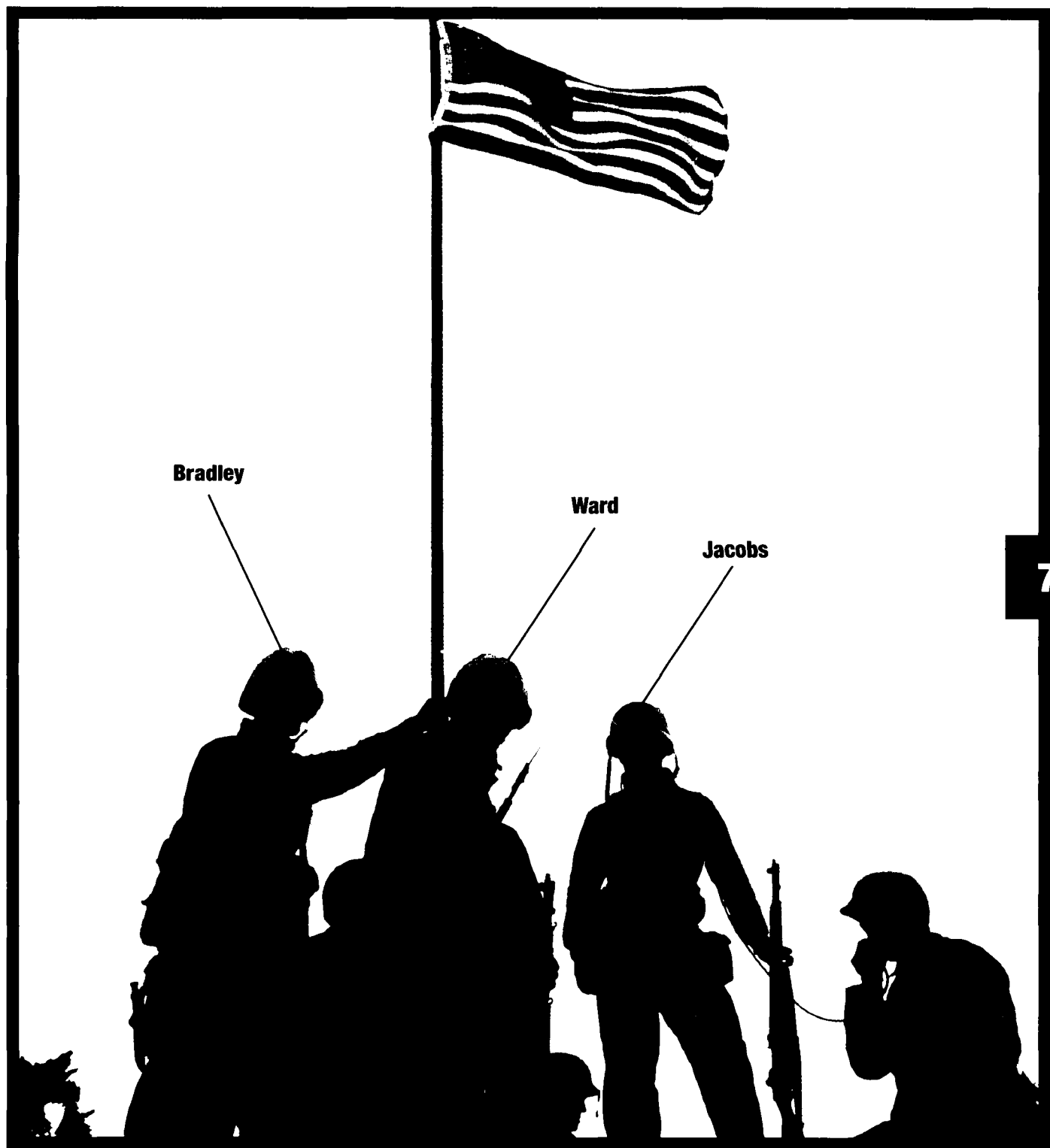




#### **6—Another Aspect—Flagpole Being Secured**

Lowery has again moved to record another angle of this first flag raising. In this photo, we see that the patrol leader, 1stLt Schrier, has moved around and is shown on the far left, kneeling and talking on the radio, perhaps reporting that the flag is up. We see Jacobs, the radio operator, and Hansen wearing his soft cover and with his M1 slung over his shoulder with fixed bayonet, and a carbine is now visible on his right shoulder.

Doc Bradley is on the right side of the flagpole, his profile clearly identifiable, and both hands on the flagpole. Boots Thomas is on the far right with his back to the photographer, and Snyder is crouched in the middle of this frame, also with his back to the photographer.



### **7-Flagpole Secured**

The flagpole is finally fixed atop Mt. Suribachi. It appears that Lowery has asked those holding the pipe to look at him. From the left, Doc Bradley, clearly visible, with his left hand on the pipe; Phil Ward in the foreground, looking down at the photographer; the radioman, Ray Jacobs; and 1stLt Schrier is talking on the radio. Hidden from the photographer in this angle are Lindberg behind Doc Bradley, Boots Thomas sitting down behind Ward and Bradley, and Hank Hansen behind Ward. Hansen's bayonet is visible, and the top of Harold Schultz's head is visible.

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### 8-Kings of the Mountain

In what is clearly a posed shot, all directly involved stand gallantly around the first flag raised on Iwo Jima. Lowery captures this moment and wraps up his photo sequence of the first flag raising with a group shot. They are (from left) Cpl Lindberg, Sgt Snyder, PhM2C Bradley, Pvt Ward, PltSgt Thomas, Sgt Hansen, PFC Jacobs, and kneeling with his back to the photographer, 1stLt Schrier.

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### 9-Best-Known First Flag-Raising Photograph

Lowery singled out one of his photographs and provided it to anyone seeking a photograph of the first flag raising. A great deal of importance has been credited to this best-known first flag-raising photograph, as it is the one typically used to identify the first flag raisers.

Lowery signed hundreds of these photographs over the years. Most of those in the earlier photographs are present, but we see that PFC James R. Michels, another of Lindberg's assault squad Marines, has been posted for security in the front foreground. Michels is usually identified among the first flag raisers because of his prominence in this photo.

Lowery has moved around the flagpole yet again to capture this aspect. Looking at the earlier photographs and keeping in mind who was located where around the flagpole and moving from the left, I have identified PFC Schultz, just a portion of his head is visible; 1stLt Schrier, with just his shoulder visible and kneeling beside the radio operator; PFC Jacobs, the radioman; Sgt Hansen, visible with both an M1 and a carbine slung over his shoulders, wearing his soft cover; Pvt Ward, with his right hand on the pipe and his helmet barely visible; PltSgt Thomas, kneeling with his left hand on his knee; PhM2C Bradley, with both hands on the flagpole and the distinct wrinkles in his helmet covering visible; PFC Michels, kneeling and looking forward as if providing security; and Cpl Lindberg behind Michels.

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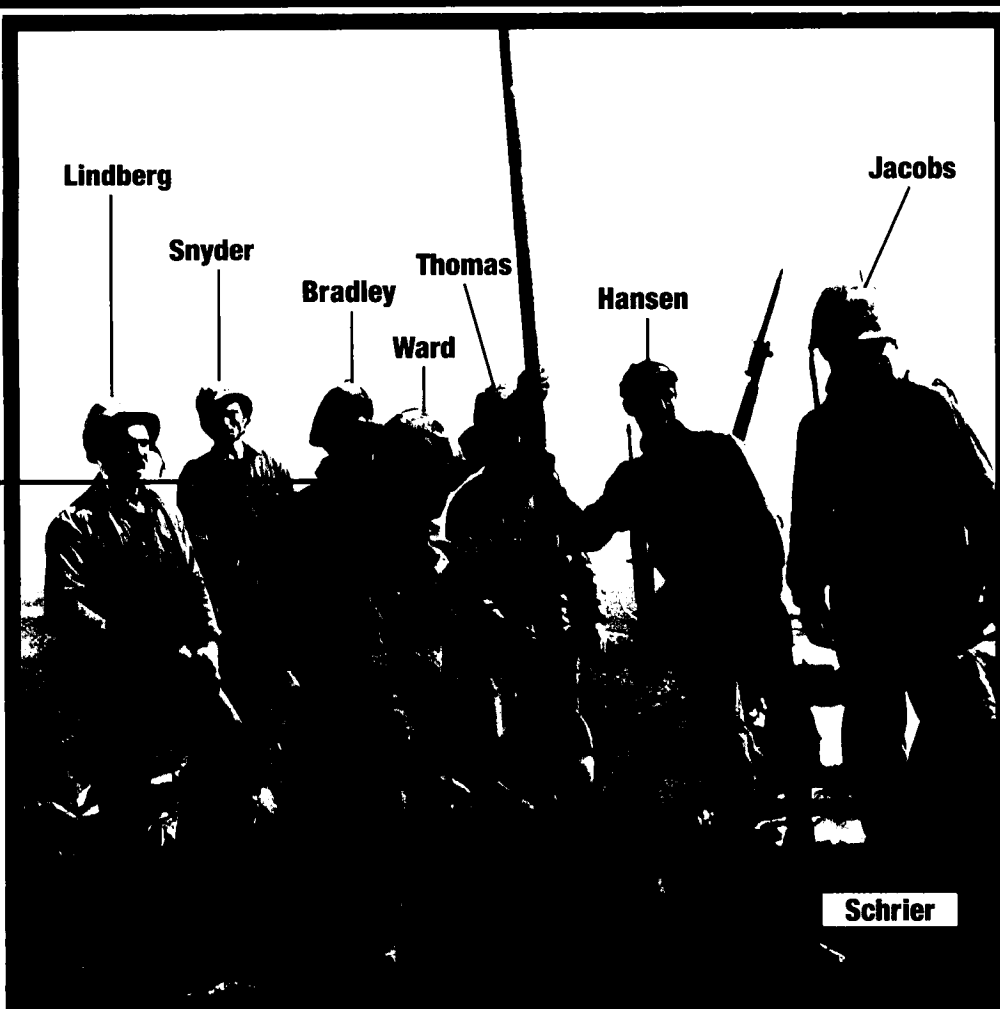
### 10-Similar Best-Known First Flag-Raising Photograph

This is an almost identical match to the most widely recognized photograph of the first flag raising. However, there is another Marine, Sgt Howard Snyder, who enters the picture from the right.

I suspect that some who came across this photograph in the past did not notice the differences between this one and the one most commonly used as the first flag-raising photograph. A small-town newspaper published this photo in the early part of this decade and thus began an intensive search of the Marine archives for all of Lowery's photographs of the first flag raising.

Lowery joined the patrol just before it began moving to the top of Suribachi. He also took pictures to document the movement up the side of the mountain. Remember, this was a combat patrol and many thought the Japanese might have allowed an earlier four-man patrol to gain the top just to lure a larger patrol into an ambush. No one knew when they might be attacked. Most importantly, Lowery did an excellent job in recording multiple perspectives of the initial flag raising.

# Making Identifications of the First Flag Raising



This photo provides the best look at the faces of those gathered around the flagpole after the first flag was raised atop Mt. Suribachi.

## Phil Ward—Making the Identification

### Positioning Around the Flagpole

In the more frequently published of Lowery's photos, Phil Ward is positioned at the spot where PFC Louis Charlo is usually identified. Charlo was not a member of this specific patrol, but as one can see from these photographs, Phil Ward was.

### Specific Pieces of Equipment

Ward is carrying equipment that is unique in comparison to the gear of the other Marines, and he has it attached to specific parts of his equipment.

One piece of equipment is a small medical pouch. This medical pouch is on the right side of his body, hanging down by his right thigh. The pouch also can be seen in the backside shot of him when he has both hands on the flagpole and is about to help raise it.

Looking very closely, one can see a ring on the ring finger of his right hand. The ring has a rectangle-shaped face. It also has a nice shine to it and sticks out very prominently in many of Lowery's photographs.

Phil Ward wore a soft cap underneath his helmet. One can see the rim of the cap protruding underneath the helmet liner.



### Facial Features

Many of these photographs give us an accurate look at the configuration of Ward's face. He has a very distinct chin with a dimple right down the middle of it.

### Personal Photograph of Phil Ward

Below on the right is a photograph provided by Phil Ward before his death. It shows how he looked during his younger days. The resemblance is striking between this picture and the close-up of the Marine in the Lowery picture. The facial structure is the same: nose, jawline, etc. The indentation on the chin is the same. In fact, in Ward's later years, the indentation on his chin was still very noticeable.

### Ward in the Best-Known First Flag-Raising Photograph

It seems like it would be very difficult to identify this Marine since he has so little of himself showing in the picture. However, the ring on the right hand of Phil Ward is visible. The ring is on his ring finger and has a small glare to it. This ring will be visible in other photographs taken by Lowery, where we also get a good look at Ward's face.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

### Summary on Ward

Phil Ward is in the middle of the action and playing a vital role in helping raise the first American flag atop Mt. Suribachi. Most importantly, he is helping make sure that the flagpole stays up and the flag continues to fly.





John Bradley

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## John Bradley—Making the Identification

### Positioning Around the Flagpole

John Bradley is in the center of the action in each of Lowery's photos capturing the first flag raising. From being in a position of readiness to help out with the raising of the first American flag atop Mt. Suribachi to holding onto the flagpole with both hands and playing an active role in securing it in the ground, Bradley was an extremely active participant.

Bradley is shown wearing his specific corpsman equipment, the medical bracelet on his right wrist and a wrinkled helmet cover. He is wearing two large canvas pouches. These are called Unit 3 pouches and contain medical supplies. Notice the two smaller pouches on his backside. These pouches actually can be seen again on Bradley in the famous second flag-raising photograph. In many of the pictures, Bradley's medical bracelet can be seen protruding from the sleeve of his right arm.

### Facial Features

By comparing these pictures with the many pictures of Bradley before and after the Battle of Iwo Jima, we can see that there is a strong resemblance.

### Bradley and the Best-Known First Flag-Raising Photograph

Returning to Lowery's best-known photo, notice how the individual has both hands on the flagpole and has the same distinct wrinkles on his camouflage helmet covering. In addition, notice the medical bracelet that is protruding from the sleeve of his right arm. This individual is sometimes identified as George Schrier, but Schrier is the one kneeling beside radioman Ray Jacobs. Schrier was on the radio, probably talking with the battalion at the time of the photograph. I believe that from the placement of the hands, the distinct wrinkles on the camouflage helmet covering and the medical bracelet on the right hand, John Bradley is the one holding the flagpole.

## Raymond Jacobs—Making the Identification

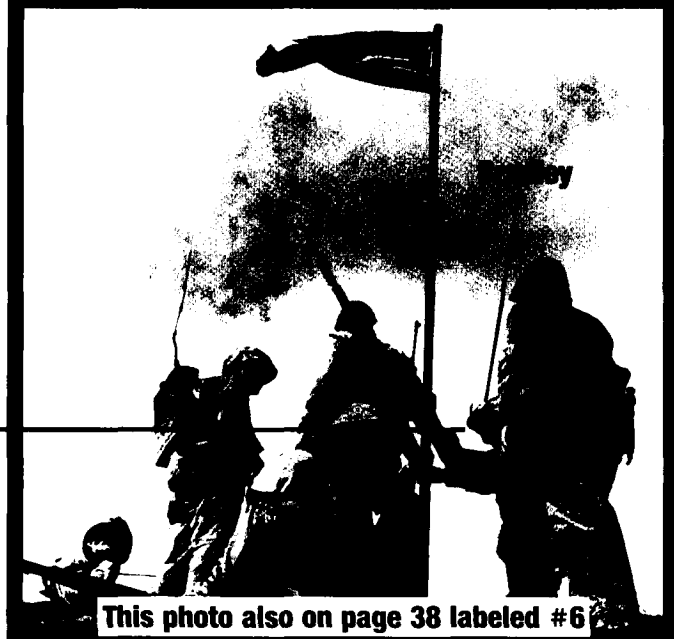
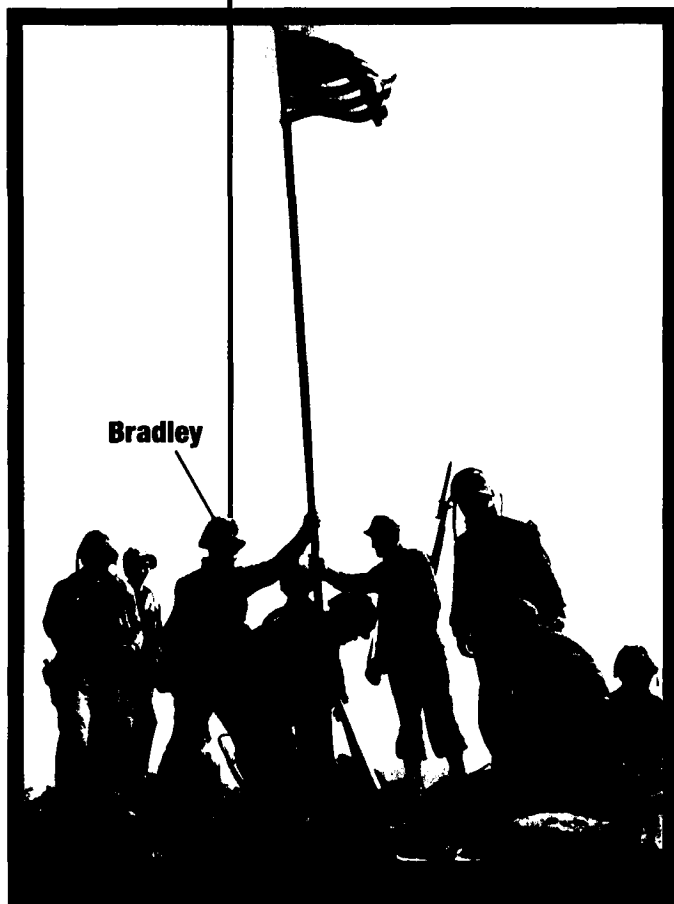
### Positioning Around the Flagpole

Ray Jacobs stays close to the action in many of the first flag-raising photographs. He has to do this since he is the radioman for the patrol and needs to remain near the patrol leader, 1stLt Schrier.

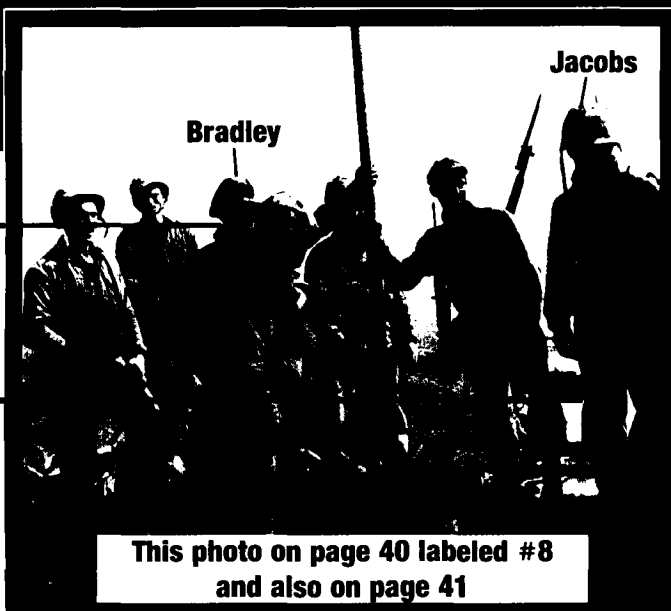


Raymond Jacobs

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This photo also on page 38 labeled #6



#### Specific Pieces of Equipment

The most specific piece of equipment that Jacobs has on is the radio on his back. It clearly can be seen in all of the first flag-raising photographs.

#### Facial Features

Through a comparison between the first flag-raising pictures and the ones Ray Jacobs has provided of himself from that time period, the resemblance is definite. In addition, a forensic scientist has backed up his claim.

#### Findings From a Forensic Scientist

Ray Jacobs' quest to be recognized as the radioman in the first flag raising was given an additional boost of credibility from a report by Dr. James I. Ebert, Certified Photogrammetrist and Fellow, American Academy of Forensic Sciences, in 2004.

Jacobs stated, "When he [Ebert] heard the nature of the case, he volunteered to work pro bono and was recommended to me by corpsman Gerald Ziehme, who had used Dr. Ebert's expertise in a similar case involving photographic identification."

Ebert examined Lowery's photos of the first flag raising and stated, "The similarities between the 'known' Ray Jacobs in the photos you sent me, and the radioman in Lowery's Mt. Suribachi photos are striking." Ebert continues his report: "More germane: whether, given the physical evidence that is available—i.e., the photographs—there is any reason to believe that the radioman is *not* Ray Jacobs." And finally his closing line of the report states in part, "The radioman shown in the Lowery photos taken on Mt. Suribachi is Ray Jacobs."

#### It Takes a Team

One picture cannot tell the history of the first flag raising. Through the hard work and courage of Lowery, we have multiple photographs that reflect the stages. One must use all of these photographs in order to come to a conclusion as to how the first flag raising played out and who was involved.

*Author's note: With the tremendous help of others, I have done my best to identify all who are in these first flag-raising photographs. I have backed up my observations with documentation and consultation from Marine veterans who were there.*

*It is now a little over 61 years after the fact, and with the upcoming release of the film "Flags of Our Fathers," I think it is important that we remember the first Iwo Jima flag raising.*



It is important to recognize that *Leatherneck* is not embarked on a rewrite of history with this article. Our purpose is to get more history out to our readers in order to tell more of the Marine Corps story. Many of the photos used in this article were discovered in our magazine archives in early 2002 and published for the first time in the June 2002 issue. They are republished here in a larger format, as they formed the impetus and the basis for the author's in-depth and detailed examination of the record of the first flag raising.

Lou Lowery was an experienced photographer and obviously did his best to capture a momentous occasion from as many angles as possible, including as many individuals as possible in his photographs. Former Corporal Chuck Lindberg, who is currently acknowledged as the sole survivor of those in the first flag-raising photographs, recently wrote in a letter to Colonel Dave Severance, USMC (Ret), and confirmed to me via telephone that even with all these photos, there is no clear photograph of the actual raising of the flag. He further noted that Doc Bradley was "standing, talking to us as we were preparing to raise the first flag but walked away and then the rest of us raised the first flag."

Mr. Lindberg went on to note that Doc Bradley "may have been up there but he did not help to raise the first flag."

Col Dave Severance provided me a copy of an extract from a winter 1985 interview with John Bradley, conducted by Arnold Shapiro of Arnold Shapiro Productions, for a PBS documentary, "Return to Iwo Jima." In the transcript of the interview, Shapiro asked, "So you didn't see the first flag raising?" Doc Bradley responded, "I don't recall—no, sir. I didn't see the first flag raising."

Although the Battle of Iwo Jima and the raising of the flags atop Mt. Suribachi occurred more than 61 years ago, these are touchstones in our country's history, reflective of American will and determination. As a Marine with almost 31 years of active service, including a piece of one war, I remain in respectful awe of the accomplishments of these heroes of Iwo Jima.

Examining the enlarged Lowery photographs and the family photographs of individuals previously not identified, the author's conclusions are convincing. However, once we consider the comments of Lindberg and Doc Bradley, there remains some doubt as to whether Doc Bradley is, in fact, a participant in the first flag raising.

Have we unraveled the mysteries of the first flag and who raised it? Not totally, but some new insights have been provided by the author.

Dustin Spence is a recent graduate of the University of California, Davis with a degree in international relations. His exhaustive research and dedication have shed new light on this iconic battle in American history. He currently is working on a video documentary, titled "Flags Over Iwo Jima," with PIX VFM. To see more on this, visit [www.flagsoveriwojima.com](http://www.flagsoveriwojima.com).

Also, this month Eric Hammel's latest work, "Iwo Jima," a coffee-table book with numerous previously unpublished photos, hits the bookshelves at the MCA. *Leatherneck* will provide a full review in next month's issue.

Col Walt Ford, USMC (Ret)  
Editor, *Leatherneck* magazine