

## Remember the glory

Author James Bradley writes about the men who fought and died at Iwo Jima 56 years ago

By ERIC AIKIN  
The Battalion

In February 1945, 80,000 men launched an assault on an 8-square-mile island in the Pacific Ocean. More than 36 days before the battle of Iwo Jima, nearly 7,000 American soldiers died. Five days into that battle, the United States captured the highest point on the island, Mount Suribachi. Atop the hill, 56 years ago today, Marine Corps troops raised the American flag as a sign of victory. Two hours later, that flag was tak-

en down for a souvenir, and a second flag was raised. Joe Rosenthal captured the second flag raising in what author James Bradley called the most reproduced photograph in the history of the camera.

Bradley spoke in a conference room in Reed Arena Sunday to an audience of more than 100 people as part of a tour for his book *Flags of Our Fathers*. Bradley's father, John "Doc" Bradley, was one of the men in the photograph. *Flags of Our Fathers* is the story of the flag raisers and what happened before and after the photograph.

The circumstances of the photo were a non-event, Bradley said. "A (military) officer wanted the first flag as a souvenir, so he said, 'Put up a replacement flag, and bring that first one down.'

"You can go into the archives and see hundreds of other flag raisings during World War II," Bradley said. "It was very common; this was just another flag raising. What happened was the photo got back to the United States (and public reaction was) 'That's a pretty good photo.' The key to this photo is not what happened at Iwo Jima. The key to this photo is what happened in civilians' minds when they saw the photo. This hit the home front like Marilyn Monroe. The photo itself became a star."

Nine years later, the photo became the inspiration for the Marine Corps memorial in Arlington, Va. When Bradley mentioned the memorial, he noted the names of the flag raisers are not on the monument.

"That symbolized my challenge," he said. "The entire world knew the image, but nobody knew the men."

Harlon Block, John Bradley, Rene Gagnon, Ira Hayes, Franklin Sousy and Mike Strank were "ordinary Americans just doing their jobs," Bradley said.

"Heroism is a matter of perception," he said. "My dad was doing his job. We see it as heroism, but the participants didn't."

John Bradley thought so little of the event he rarely mentioned it to his family. The famous photograph did not hang in their house. Even Bradley's mother did not know much more about the flag raising than the rest of the family.

After John "Doc" Bradley's death in 1994, James Bradley found three boxes of his father's personal belongings. Among them was memorabilia of the flag raising. Most memorable to James Bradley was a letter from his father to his parents. In the letter he mentions raising the flag, writing, "It was the happiest moment of my life."

James Bradley did not understand why his father never shared his "happiest moment." The search for that understanding led him to contact family members of the other flag raisers.

"I didn't set out to write a book," he said. "I called the other relatives of the flag raisers just to see what they knew about the whole deal. They told me such fascinating stories, I thought I ought to write a book."

James Bradley's book not only tells those stories but also presents a more accurate image of the men who fought and died at Iwo Jima.

"It's good to see (James Bradley) pursue the real legacy about the people, rather than the John Wayne image," said John Guido, a staff member at the Texas Engineering Extension Service at Texas A&M. John Wayne portrayed a heroic Marine in the movie *The Sands of Iwo Jima*.

*Flags of Our Fathers* chronicles the six men and how they came together for this "non-event."

The book also tells the aftermath of the flag raising. Three of the men, Block, Sousy and Strank, were killed in action on Iwo Jima. Gagnon and Hayes suffered immense personal problems dealing with the war and the fame from the photograph. Hayes died in 1955, and Gagnon in 1979. John Bradley survived, dying a natural death at age 71, rarely mentioning Iwo Jima.

"It wasn't something you brought up at cocktail parties," James Bradley said.

When his father finally granted an interview in 1985, he told the interviewer, "People refer to us as heroes. We certainly weren't heroes."

Before his speech, James Bradley said, "I think there were 80,000 heroes on that island," referring to all the soldiers who took part in the invasion. He point-

ed out Neil Berry, an Iwo Jima veteran in attendance at Reed Arena and said, "There's one right there."

Berry, originally from Lubbock, Texas, was on Iwo Jima the entire 36 days. "Pure hell" is how he described it.

"I'll never forget that experience," he said. "War is bad. We've got to find a way to keep that from happening again."

When asked if he would ever visit the island, as James Bradley did during research for *Flags of Our Fathers*, Berry said, "Maybe. I'm not sure. I got off it once."



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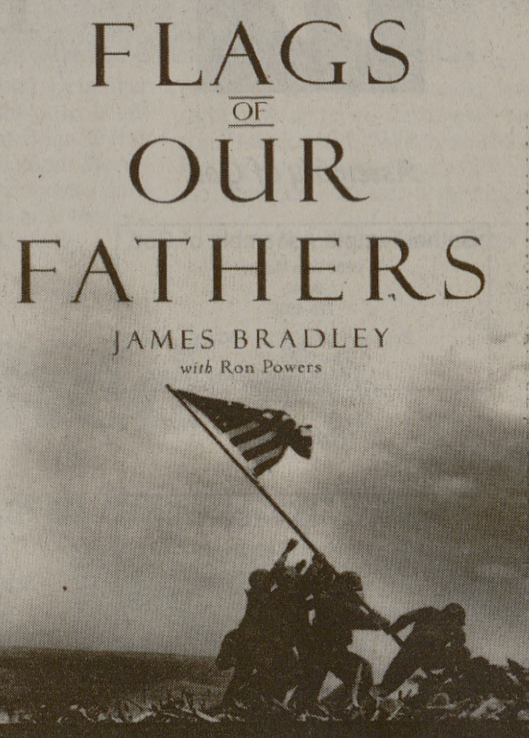


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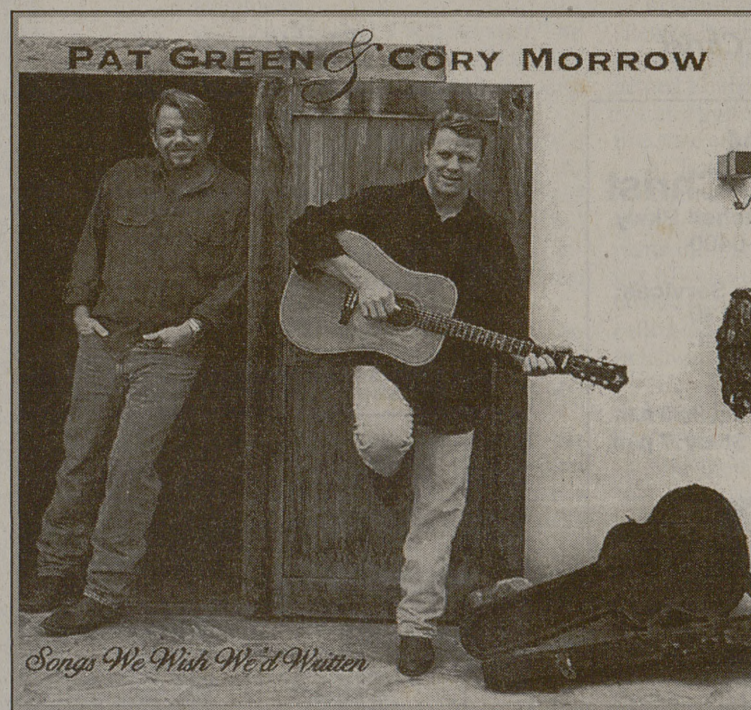
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