

# **Flags of Our Fathers Study Guide**

**Flags of Our Fathers by James Bradley (author)**

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# Plot Summary

"Flags of Our Fathers" by James Bradley tells the true story of the men who were the flag raisers in the iconic image taken during the horrific battle of Iwo Jima during the Pacific phase of World War II. The account begins with an explanation by James Bradley, author and son of one of the flag raisers, of what compelled him to pursue the story of these men. Bradley and his seven siblings knew that their father's experiences in World War II, the flag raising and its aftermath, were subjects that his father did not want to discuss. After his father's death, James decided to find out what caused his father's reaction, how the six flag raisers came together on Iwo Jima and the aftermath of the war and the event on these men.

The six flag raisers were all young men, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-four. As World War II raged, the young men and their families knew the writing was on the wall. They may soon be part of it. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, their fates were sealed. Many of the men joined the Marines to avoid being drafted by the Army. Jack Bradley was urged by his father to join the Navy so he could avoid combat. Little did father or son know that by joining the Navy, Jack would be heading for the bloodiest battle in U.S. history.

Jack, who had been working as a medic in a military hospital in Oakland, was transferred to San Diego where he was attached to a Marine unit. The unit, E Company which was ironically referred to as Easy Company, began a rigorous training program that began in San Diego and was finally completed a year later on a small atoll in the Pacific called Tarawa. The six flag raisers were part of a huge armada of more than 800 ships heading for a historic confrontation that would take place on Island X, which was later revealed as Iwo Jima. Conquering that island was thought to be strategic in driving back Japanese aggression.

The battle on Iwo Jima lasted 36 bloody days with the Americans finally emerging victorious. However, the losses were stunning—Americans suffered some 26,000 casualties. Early in the battle, the Marines had taken Suribachi, a volcanic mountain on the southern tip of the island. A discarded pipe was used as a flag pole and an American flag was located on one of the ships. The first flag raising was with a smaller flag and different soldiers. A larger flag was attached to the make-shift pole and hoisted by six different marines and was captured by Joe Rosenthal, an imbedded AP photographer. Rosenthal was certain the photo would be blurred or lack good quality. But when the film was finally processed, an AP editor said it all when he proclaimed, "This is one for history." The reaction in America was overwhelming—the photo represented hope and victory even though the actual battle on Iwo Jima was far from over.

Three flag raisers were killed in battle shortly after the photo was taken. Jack Bradley was seriously injured and dispatched to a military hospital. The other two men battled on uninjured until the island was conquered. The surviving flag raisers were recruited by President Truman to head the war bond drive. Bradley never felt comfortable with the "hero" label he received. To him, the true heroes were the ones that didn't get to come



home. Ira Hayes rejected the hero image as well but experienced many personal problems after returning from active duty. The other surviving flag raiser, Rene, enjoyed the limelight but felt he was never given a chance for success after returning as a hero from the war.

Rosenthal won the Pulitzer Prize for the photo and Felix de Weldon created the famous sculpture of the flag raising that resides at Arlington National Cemetery. The image will remain an inspiration to victory and hope but represents one of the most horrific battles in U.S. history.

# Chapter One: Sacred Ground

## Chapter One: Sacred Ground Summary and Analysis

Author James Bradley traveled to Iwo Jima with his elderly mother and three brothers. They were going to visit the memorial on the small Japanese island where the famous American Flag raising took place near the end of World War II. Bradley's father was one of those six soldiers who participated in that event.

Bradley had always wondered why his father would never talk about the iconic event. Yet, after his father died, he and his brothers found letters that John Bradley had written to his parents after the event and he referred to the flag raising as the "happiest moment of his life." Yet, John would never talk about it, even at the urging of James and his other seven siblings.

Once the family members reached the Suribachi mountain on Iwo Jima, the spot where the raising of the flag took place, they placed a commemorative plaque on the site honoring their father. The battle that raged on for 36 days on the island was one of the war's bloodiest. Two-thirds of the American soldiers who took part were either killed or injured. Of the six boys who hoisted the flag, three were ultimately buried there, of which one was carried off on a stretcher and two walked away.



## Chapter Two: All-American Boys

### Chapter Two: All-American Boys Summary and Analysis

After his visit to Iwo Jima, Bradley decided to try to find out as much as possible about the six young men who raised the American Flag on Iwo Jima, including his father who was a silent and private man. For that purpose, he read many books and interviewed scores of people.

John Bradley's father, James Bradley, was a railroad man and a veteran of World War I. His mother, Kathryn, was the worrier in the family but always relied upon her Catholic religion to get her through. When the Depression hit, John moved his wife and five kids from Texas to Appleton, WI, where there was more potential. It was at church where young Jack noticed the prosperous funeral directors and aspired to be like them. He eventually worked part-time at a funeral parlor as a student.

Jack met his wife, Betty Van Gorp, when they were in the third grade. James had the ideal life of football in the fall and baseball in the spring. Everything was idyllic until his five-year-old sister came down with pneumonia and died. The family was grief stricken. After WWII was underway, Jack joined the Navy thinking he'd avoid battle. Little did he know that by joining the Navy he would be heading for one of history's bloodiest battles.

Franklin Sousley, Hilltop, Kentucky: Franklin's parents were struggling tobacco farmers. Franklin's older brother, Malcolm, died at five years of age in his mother's arms of a ruptured appendix. A short year later, his father, Duke passed away, leaving his wife with Franklin and a younger brother Julian. Franklin became the man of the house and did what he could to help his mother, Goldie, who was fragile from so much loss. Franklin took a job at a refrigerator plant a few towns away and sent most of his earnings home to his mother. When he got word that he was drafted, he decided to make the best of it and by-pass the Army by joining the Marines. Goldie now had more to worry about.

Harlon Block, Rio Grande Valley, Texas; Harlon's father, Ed Block, loved farming while his mother, Belle, preferred to live in large towns or in cities. However, to please her husband, she agreed to move to the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas and try their hand at farming. Belle had good foresight in that she saw a future in dairy farming. They bought cows and over time were running a successful dairy business. Belle became involved in the Seventh Day Adventist church which was firmly against any form of violence including war.

When Harlon wanted to try out for the football team, Belle was adamantly against it because she considered it a violent sport. However, Harlon was determined and became a football star on his high school team. Harlon was a shy young man who attracted girls but he was awkward and uncomfortable with them. Right before he left



for the war, he dated Catherine Pierce who later related that they never even held hands.

When Ira was born, his reservation was not recognized by Arizona and the Pima Indians who lived there could not vote and did not have legal access to the US court system. Ira was the eldest of six children - two babies died at birth and two children died before age 30. Ira's father, Jobe, was a cotton farmer and a quiet man who could go for days without uttering a word. Ira was much like his father. Ira was very bright and loved to read. He was the most prolific writer of the six flag raisers. Even though the Pima were not citizens, many of the tribe's young men volunteered to fight in France during WWI. A Pima Indian was the first Arizona soldier to be killed in action in World War I, a fact that made the tribe very proud. Ira joined the Marines when he was 19 years old.

Rene Gagnon was the only child of French Canadians Henry and Irene Gagnon who had settled in an ethnic enclave on the west side of Manchester, NH. His parents divorced when he was a toddler and Irene supported them with her job at the mill. The darkly handsome Rene dropped out of high school after two years and took a job at the mill where his mother worked. Irene became concerned when one of their young co-workers, Pauline Harnois, began monopolizing all of Rene's time. Some time after Pearl Harbor, Rene received a draft notice which compelled him to join the Marines. His mother was worried about him but thought it would be good for him to get away from Pauline. She didn't know that the seventeen-year-old Rene had already promised to marry Pauline when he returned from the war.

The "old man" of the group was 24-year-old Mike Strank. Mike was a sergeant and admired by his men - a real "Marine's Marine." He was strong and fearless but above all, he was a real leader. Born in Czechoslovakia, his father immigrated to America when Mike was just a year old. His father, Vasil, worked at the iron mines for three years before he could send for his wife, Martha, and baby Mike. The family eventually had two more sons and a daughter.

As the eldest boy and the brightest child, Mike learned teamwork at an early age and often was the intermediary between his father and younger brothers - thus becoming a "sergeant" at a very young age. Mike did not know English when he went to first grade. However, he was so bright that by the end of the year, he was so proficient in the language that he skipped second grade. When the Depression hit, Mike became a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) worker. The CCC was a plan to put people to work devised by President Roosevelt.

The quasi-military structure of working for the CCC, prepared Mike and millions of other young boys for the military. After two years in the CCC, Mike emerged 40 pounds heavier, tanned and handsome. After hearing that Hitler was invading his Czech homeland, Mike joined the Marines. He did not have to fight because of his citizenry but that didn't stop him. He would soon be transformed into a tough and confident leader.



# Chapter Three: America's War

## Chapter Three: America's War Summary and Analysis

The "day that will live in infamy," was the day Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan. America were then compelled to engage in the war and fight alongside the allies in Europe. In specific retaliation to Japan's attack in Hawaii, America would stand alone in the Pacific and the Pacific war would be "America's war."

By 1941, Japan was an old hand at war, having been in battle with China for ten years. Their strategy in attacking the US in Pearl Harbor, was to send a warning shot across the bow of a peaceful nation from a warring empire that had a powerful and experienced military and navy. By so doing, they believed, the US would never engage Japan in a conflict and thus would not stop them from conquering other nations. Revenge was in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of young American boys who, after hearing Roosevelt's inspiring speech, overwhelmed enlistment centers.

The Japanese fought their way to the South Pacific where they were building a landing strip on Guadalcanal, just northeast of Australia. The Americans and allies knew the Japanese had to be stopped and quickly. Under veteran Marine officer Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith, a veteran of WWI, the Marines were ramped up to become a first-rate amphibious force. Marines landed on Guadalcanal but were beaten back by the Japanese. Four US ships retreated, abandoning hundreds of Marines on the island to fight off the Japanese by themselves. Eventually, the Marines were victorious, with 23,000 Japanese killed and another 13,000 who fled. The Marines handed the Japanese Imperial Army its first defeat.

The Japanese were trained to be brutal warriors in the tradition of the ancient samurai. The Japanese soldiers were taught to believe that the highest honor was to lay down their lives for their country. The stunning victory by the Marines inspired the young men of America. The Marines, unlike the Army, was a volunteer operation. And, they had a secret weapon. While the Navy had ships and the Air Force had planes, the Marines had esprit de corps. The Japanese were facing a worthy opponent. While the Japanese would fight to the death for their Emperor, the Marines would fight to death for each other and for their country.





# Chapter 4: Call of Duty

## Chapter 4: Call of Duty Summary and Analysis

Mike Strank was the only flag raiser who enlisted prior to Pearl Harbor. Two years after first enlisting, Strank who had been training officers at Parris Island, was a sergeant and heading for combat. At about the same time, Ira Hayes was in Marine boot camp near San Diego. He was accepted into Marine parachute school and got his paratrooper wings in 1942. Everyone was proud of "Chief Falling Cloud" as his peers often called him.

Harlon Block and his football teammates all decided to join the Marines in 1942. Belle was the most distressed. Killing and weaponry was against her religion. But peer pressure at school was stronger than his mother's protests. Seventeen-year-old Harlon needed the signature of one parent. His mother refused but his father had little hesitation—something that his wife had a difficult time forgiving. Harlon, like Mike and Ira, excelled in his training. Harlon also went into paratrooper school. He shipped out for duty in November 1943.

Mike joined the Marine unit called the Raiders which was considered the toughest outfit in the Pacific. On the island of Bougainville, his unit was able to withstand both the Japanese snipers and the horrible weather and terrain. Later Ira and Harlon were both dispatched to the island of Bougainville where they joined Mike and his Raiders unit. The experience on Bougainville would change their lives forever.

Jack's father encouraged him to join the Navy since it would be just a matter of time before he was drafted into the Army. Being in the Navy, he would avoid most of the combat. While he was training, Jack was told he was chosen to be a Seabee—the Seabees was the Navy's engineering cadre that engaged in road building and railroad repair and were often under fire. Jack didn't want to go with the Seabees and the Navy didn't insist. He was sent to help with the wounded at a hospital in Oakland, CA. With San Francisco right across the bay for weekend R&R, Jack was quite satisfied with his assignment.

Seventeen-year-old Rene joined the Marines for quite a different reason than the others—he liked the glitzy uniform. Rene trained at Parris Island and was later assigned to guard duty at the Charleston Navy base in South Carolina.

When Mike's unit landed on Bougainville on November 1, 1943, they were met with devastating gunfire from Japanese machine guns and artillery fire. The enemy was almost invisible, camouflaged so well in the dense foliage. Many Marines were dying all around Mike. A month later, Ira's unit landed on the island. The men spent several days in foxholes, waiting out a severe monsoon. One night, there was a blood curdling scream in Ira's foxhole. A Japanese soldier had sneaked in and, after a struggle, Ira killed him. A few weeks later, Harlon was on Bougainville and arrived during a brutal



battle site known as "Hellzapoppin' Ridge." It was there that Harlon experienced his first hand-to-hand combat.

The three flag raisers on Bougainville, Mike, Ira and Harlon, would never discuss their experiences there but after that battle, death was never far from their minds. After winning Bougainville, the three sailed back to San Diego with their units where Franklin Sousley was going through his initial training. Rene was still in South Carolina and Jack was transferred to a hospital in San Diego. Jack was expected to not only take care of injured marines but to withstand the rigors as battle as well. He was now wearing the Marine uniform and had to stay up with their rigorous schedule.

Mike, Ira and Harlon were given leave to visit their homes. All three seemed markedly more serious, even sullen, than when they left. They all sensed a feeling of their own mortality. Mike and Harlon both told friends they'd probably never see them again. Ira cried softly at his family's send-off. Franklin was on furlough after training. He asked Marion Hamm to wait for him. He told his mother that when he returned, he would be a hero.

The battle on the tiny atoll of Tarawa foreshadowed the fate of the flag raisers. Three hundred marines had been slaughtered when they landed on Tarawa. However, the Marines persevered and after three days of horrendous fighting, the Marines took the atoll. The Marines suffered a horrific loss of 4,400 casualties. The battle opened a new front for the Americans on the Pacific front. In March of 1944, the Marines created a new division called Destiny, which would ultimately draw the six flag raisers together.

# Chapter Five: Forging the Spearhead

## Chapter Five: Forging the Spearhead Summary and Analysis

The flag raisers were all now at Camp Pendleton near Los Angeles. The new Fifth Marine Division was scheduled to be activated on November 11, 1943, Armistice Day. All six boys were assigned to Company E, ironically named "Easy." The new force was called Spearhead and was given a special insignia. Through the spring and summer months, the boys went through intensive training including a phase covering amphibious operations. The boys spotted a special visitor. It was FDR who came by to confer with the generals on several occasions.

Jack, nicknamed "Doc," supervised other corpsmen in the company and had contact with all the other boys who came to see him as an important part of their lives. He went out of his way to help anyone who needed a favor. Doc was remembered for his kindness. At Camp Pendleton, Jack met who would become his best friend, Ralph "Iggy" Ignatowski. Iggy was key to Jack's lifelong silence on his WWII experiences.

Mike headed what was considered the best squad which Harlon, Ira and Franklin were part of. Ira's admiration for Mike was undeniable. Ira gravitated to Franklin who was one of the few people who could make the dour Ira laugh. Rene was not well-liked. Others thought he had cowardly ways, always looking for the easy way out. Mike tried to turn Rene around but it didn't work. Rene was given messenger duty but remained part of the unit.

After six months of training, the boys headed for Hawaii for a brief R&R stop and then on to Camp Tarawa for more training. During this phase of training, they would learn how to disembark, take the beach and cut off a targeted area. The officers' strategy room was called the "conference center" and was off-limits to the troops. The officers discussed the top secret plans for Spearhead's ultimate destination to Island X. After four months of rigorous training at Camp Tarawa, the boys of Spearhead sailed off for Island X or Iwo Jima.



# Chapter Six: Armada

## Chapter Six: Armada Summary and Analysis

First stopping in Honolulu, the armada traveled day and night toward their destination. The four-thousand mile journey took three weeks. The E Company was on the USS Missoula which, like all the ships, had only small and cramped quarters for the men. Two days out the boys were told that their destination was Iwo Jima. No ordinary battle waited for the boys. Rather, it would be a battle of epic proportion, changing the fates of east and west forever. The armada consisted of more than 800 ships and one-hundred thousand men all on their way to converge on an eight-mile square island.

The taking of Iwo Jima was seen as imperative since it was home to a radar station, several airstrips and a fleet of Japanese warplanes. The combat plans laid out on large maps showed how the 28th regiment would land closest to Hot Rocks, the nickname given to Suribachi, the mountain made from the lava flow of centuries. The scores of black dots on the map of the beachfront represented locations where enemy fire would originate. Since Iwo Jima was considered as homeland by the Japanese, the boys knew that it held more meaning for the enemy than other islands that had been taken.

Prior to the arrival of the armada, the Air Force had been pummeling the small island. The bombing would last a total of 72 consecutive days—the longest such assault during the Pacific War. Surprisingly, the bombing was ineffective as surveillance data showed that the Japanese defenses had actually increased during the aerial siege.

General Kuribayashi was determined to cause as many American casualties as possible. Unknown to the American leaders, Kuribayashi had Japanese engineers create subterranean facilities that included a war room, stairs, passageways, and tunnels, which were all designed to keep the number of Japanese soldiers on the island secret. The strategy worked—the Americans estimated that no more than 13,000 Japanese soldiers could be on the island while the actual number was 22,000. General Smith, who was leading the charge by the Marines, was angered over what he felt was the lack of full cooperation by the Navy. He felt they had the capacity to bombard the island more effectively than they did. Knowing that they were heading for a brutal battle as the armada neared Iwo Jima, each young boy was lost in his own thoughts.



# Chapter Seven: D Day and Chapter 8: D Day Plus One

## Chapter Seven: D Day and Chapter 8: D Day Plus One Summary and Analysis

Early on the morning of February 19, 1945, the boys from Easy Company walked down the metal ramps of the Missoula to their waiting amphibious tractors. When the Navy bombers halted their assault, hundreds of amphibious tractors began landing on the black shores of Iwo Jima. There was no immediate gunfire from the enemy when the Marines first vacated their amphibious vehicles. The Marines followed their attack plan and began climbing the terraces. A short time later, the barrage of enemy gunfire began. The Marines became targets in a crossfire shooting gallery from snipers located at various points around Suribachi. The Marines were taking heavy casualties and the prospects of victory seemed bleak. Although the volcanic ash created a soft terrain that slowed the men down, it also served to blunt the impact of the mortar fire and shrapnel.

Ira wrote later that he was scared to death. When he first set foot on the beach, it was right by a dead Marine, shot in the head. Mike proved to be a leader when it really mattered. He was a calming presence to his men. Despite the rough beginning, the Marines toughed it out and began to inflict some damage on the enemy. Not understanding that there was a fresh supply of Japanese soldiers located in the tunnels below, the Marines were puzzled that they did not see much progress.

Doc Bradley was busy with casualties from the moment he set foot on the beach. He was a target of the enemy. The Japanese were trained to look for soldiers carrying medical pouches. Taking them out would increase their overall kill rate. John Fredatovich, Doc's first casualty, remembered the take-charge manner that he had in tending to the injured. By noon, there were 9,000 Marines on the island. The Marines were finally making progress despite fighting the "invisible" enemy and dealing with a relentless air assault, land mines and the spider traps and caves that were linked to the tunnel system below. By afternoon, it was difficult for more Marines to come ashore due to the stacked up dead marines and their abandoned vehicles. The first day's casualties of 566 dead and 1,755 wounded made FDR gasp. The first day ended but another thirty-five were to follow.

Rain poured the next day making the unloading of equipment difficult. Japanese artillery fire wiped out two casualty stations on the beach killing many of the already wounded. The 3,000 men of the 28th Regiment would be advancing south toward the volcano while 33,000 Marines would fight their way north. Easy Company was being used as a back-up reserve unit. After being called in, Easy Company began slowing advancing to the east.



At fourteen, Jack Lucas lied about his age and joined the marines. He was assigned to drive a truck in Hawaii but stowed aboard a transport heading for the Pacific War. On the second day on Iwo Jima, Lucas fell on two grenades to shield his buddies. They were shocked to find him alive and awake. He pulled through and at seventeen became the nation's youngest recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Bulldozers made huge mass graves for the dead and as many as fifty would be buried at a time. Although Bradley was exhausted and ordered to take a break, he refused. He continued to look for wounded. He told the commander he couldn't abandon his friends. The end of day two saw 3,500 casualties. During the sleepless night, the boys witnessed a Japanese mortar shell hit a Marine ammunition dump. The resulting explosion lit the sky for an hour.



# Chapter Nine: D Day Plus Two and Chapter Ten: D Day Plus Three

## Chapter Nine: D Day Plus Two and Chapter Ten: D Day Plus Three Summary and Analysis

On the third day, Easy Company was facing a long trek on the volcano's northeastern side. It was a relatively short span between the base of the mountain and where the 28th Regiment rested for the night but it would become the worst killing ground in the Pacific War. The barren ground was dotted with firing ports which gave the Japanese vantage points from which they could pick off the advancing Americans.

The commander expected tanks to arrive that would shield the soldiers but they never came. He had no choice but to send them in without protection. They advanced toward the mountain. Mike, Harlon, Doc, Ira and Franklin ran from one protective shell hole to another, dodging bullets and mortar all the while. Although their friends were dying around them, they had to keep advancing. Doc steadfastly helped the wounded with all the strength he could find, risking his life while administering morphine or pulling the wounded to safety. Jack Bradley never told his family but for his actions he received the Navy Cross. Doc tended to Lieutenant Keith Wells who had been severely injured. After patching him together, Wells insisted on commanding his unit although he was advised against it. Soaked with blood, racked with pain and near collapse, Wells finally gave his command over to his sergeant. Wells was given the Navy Cross for his bravery and leadership.

Finally, the tanks arrived and shielded the advancing Americans who were then able to make more progress. The Japanese first-line defense was finally starting to collapse. Although the Marines advanced to form a semi-circle around the mountain, their losses were great: 644 killed, 4,168 wounded and 560 unaccounted for. For that single day, Easy Company was awarded a Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, two Silver Stars and numerous Purple Hearts—one of the most decorated single days in history. But Easy Company had lost thirty percent of its force to casualties. At dusk, a kamikaze pilot crashed into the USS Bismarck moored just off the island, setting off all its torpedoes on impact. The ship exploded and all two hundred men on board were lost.

The fourth day was used to reorganize and supply the men again. Since the Americans were gaining ground, heavy equipment was brought in to patrol the beach and exploratory groups were dispatched to look for random enemy soldiers in caves and pill boxes. The Marines could sometimes hear the Japanese soldiers talking beneath them. The Marines took care of these enemies by dropping down grenades along with a good measure of gasoline. Uncharacteristically, that night 150 Japanese soldiers tried to escape to the north under cover of darkness. However, under heavy fire from the Marines, only 25 were able to get through. Those who got through told the commander

in the north that Suribachi had fallen. Colonel Johnson at 2nd Battalion headquarters issued the command that the mountain would be taken in the morning.





# Chapter Eleven: The Flags

## Chapter Eleven: The Flags Summary and Analysis

After four days of viscous battle, Suribachi stood silent before the Marines. A small exploratory group of soldiers that scrambled to the top of the volcano mountain found no enemy soldiers and took no enemy fire. Colonel Johnson then ordered that a platoon be sent to the top of Suribachi. Among those who were dispatched were Mike, Harlon, Franklin, Ira and Doc. Lieutenant H. George Schrier was named the leader of the probe. Just before he departed, Johnson handed Schrier a small American Flag from the USS Missoula. It was small, measuring only fifty-four by twenty-eight inches.

A sergeant named Louis Lowery, a photographer for *Leatherneck* magazine, accompanied the forty-man unit that ascended the mountain. Those on the ground watched with great concern, almost certain that Japanese soldiers awaited the group just over the rise. Later, Lieutenant Severance admitted he thought he was sending them to their deaths. The forty men had the same sentiment. Doc had the additional concern about how he would drag the injured off the rugged, volcanic mountain. It took the group forty minutes to reach the top. Not a shot was fired.

The men found debris on the summit—twisted Japanese equipment melted by American bombs. Sergeant Thomas told someone to find something they could use for a pole so they could raise the flag. Several men rummaged through the debris and found a pipe that could serve as a pole. Lieutenant Schrier, Sergeant Hansen and Corporal Lindberg were the first to raise the flag, as Lowery clicked away with his camera. Once it was raised, cheers and whistles emanated from the ships moored off-shore. Many who watched from the island below mistakenly assumed the battle of Iwo Jima was over. That was far from the truth as sniper fire immediately began anew.

A photographer, Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press, was embedded with the Marines. Accompanying several commanders, Rosenthal went ashore with his camera. Too late for the flag raising, the photographer and two colleagues, decided to climb to the summit anyway. Lt. Severance ordered Mike, Harlon, Ira and Franklin to string a telephone wire to the summit. The original American flag that was raised on Suribachi was to be removed and kept as a memento of the event. A second flag, much larger than the original, was found on board one of the ships and brought ashore. Severance gave the larger flag to Rene to bring to the top with orders to hoist it on the make-shift flag pole—the bigger one would be seen by one and all on the island and anchored off shore.

After Rene brought the new flag and it was affixed to the pole, he joined Mike, Ira, Franklin and Harlon who were trying to hoist the heavy pole upward. Doc was passing by with some medical supplies. He dropped them when he was asked to help the others lift the flag. Now with everyone in place, the flag went up. Rosenthal was only able to get one shot. He was disappointed, not knowing if the quality of his single shot would be



any good. The replacement flag was secured with rocks to keep it standing and it stood for three weeks before the wind chewed it up. Rosenthal took a group picture of Marines that included Mike, Ira, Doc and Franklin in front of the flag. Rosenthal, who took more time with this photograph, was sure he had at least one good picture that would hit the newspapers back home.

# Chapter 12: Myths

## Chapter 12: Myths Summary and Analysis

Rosenthal's film pack was tossed into a mail plane headed for Guam. The process to develop and publish photos from the war was a long and convoluted one. Many film packs wound up in the trash can. Technicians developed the photos. If mistakes were made, the film was trashed. The censors would then scrutinize the finished photos and finally a pool chief would decide which photos were worthy of being published. Of Rosenthal's twelve pack that contained the iconic photograph, two photographs that were adjacent to it were overexposed. Jack Bradley wrote his parents on February 26, 1945, telling them he was in good health and that he took part in a flag raising on Iwo Jima. Franklin wrote his mother to watch for a picture of him raising the flag. Rene wrote to Pauline but didn't mention the flag raising.

Back home, news of the valorous work of the Marines and Navy on Iwo Jima stole the headlines away from General Patton and President Roosevelt. More reporters were dispatched to cover the Pacific War. There wasn't all good news to report as American casualties on the tiny island began to mount. Just in time to boost everyone's morale, the famous picture finally emerged. John Bodkin, AP's photograph editor, picked up a glossy of Rosenthal's flag-raising picture and new immediately it was dynamite. "Here's one for all time" (pg. 119.) The next morning, millions of Americans were transfixed by the image that was run in all the major newspapers. The picture signaled hope and victory. When Belle saw the picture, she somehow knew it was her son even though the photograph showed only his back.

Although no one initially knew the identity of the soldier flag raisers, Joe Rosenthal was an instant star. The photo did not represent what was really going on, of course. The biggest myth associated with the Rosenthal photograph was that the Marines were victorious while in actuality the battle raged on. Many only knew about the first flag raising and little or no attention was given to the second one. Photographs of the first flag raising never made it to the newspapers. Reporters who knew the whole story unintentionally created confusion about the flag raising. A story of a victorious flag raising was much more compelling than the bitter fight that continued on for weeks afterward.



# Chapter Thirteen: We Gave Our Today

## Chapter Thirteen: We Gave Our Today Summary and Analysis

On March 1st, Easy Company re-joined the Twenty-eighth Marines along the dangerous east coast. As Mike led a small group of Marines across the rugged terrain, they came under fire. Mike and the others dove for a foxhole where a dead marine was laying. A few moments later, Mike was dead. Sadly, the others were quite sure he was hit by friendly fire from one of the destroyers. Doc Bradley was almost the victim of a banzai attack from four advancing Japanese soldiers. But an astute Marine who was nearby saved him from certain death. Harlon Block temporarily took over for Mike. Only a few hours after Mike died, Harlon was blown apart while planning next moves. His letter home to Belle that he hadn't received a scratch would not be sent until days after he had been killed.

Congressman Joseph Hendricks of Florida introduced a bill that a monument based on Rosenthal's photo be erected. By March 3, some 3,000 Americans had been killed on Iwo Jima and 16,000 were wounded. The losses were not limited to soldiers as Colonel Johnson and Sergeant Thomas had both lost their lives. Doc's good friend, Ralph Ignatowski was missing. Easy Company, under the charge of the newly promoted Captain Severance, advanced to the northern killing fields. Doc looked for and asked about Iggy, but no one had seen him. In Congress, Representative Mike Mansfield proposed a new campaign for war bonds to finance the war. The plan was unanimously approved and would use Rosenthal's photo of the flag raisers for inspiration.

Iggy's body was found in a cave. He had been tied up and obviously severely tortured. It was Doc's job to handle his remains and there is little doubt that this experience was a major reason for Doc's many years of silence. The fatigued and battered troops were slogging their way through the Iwo Jima operation. Progress was being made, however slowly. There were less casualties. More than three-hundred American B-29s were using the airstrips freely. It was from Iwo Jima that American planes made their first air raids on Tokyo.

On March 11th, Doc's fighting days came to an abrupt end. He suffered serious injury from a shrapnel wound in his right leg and foot and his left foot. Even though he was bleeding heavily, he kept helping his fellow soldiers. Some fragments were removed in the aid station there. He was loaded on a plane to Guam the next day from where he would be transported to Hawaii. The next day, Rene fired his rifle for the first time, killing a Japanese soldier aiming at him. He later told his son that it was either "him or me" but that there was no glory in killing. On March 14th, Iwo Jima was declared conquered by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz even though Marines were still falling. There was interest in using the flag raisers to "star" in the war bond tour, but the only identified soldier was Rene. Franklin Sousley wandered onto a narrow road one day and was shot to death. Soldiers who were with him all ducked when the gunfire started but Franklin did not.



Was he daydreaming or thinking about home? No one could answer. General Kuribayashi's body was never found but the block house where he had led his battle was blown apart.

On March 25, Easy Company—what was left of it—had completed its responsibilities on Iwo Jima. American soldiers had killed some 21,000 Japanese but suffered more than 26,000 casualties. Twenty-seven decorations for valor were awarded for the month-long battle on Iwo Jima. It stands as America's most heroic battle.



# Chapter Fourteen: Antigo and Chapter Fifteen: Coming Home

## Chapter Fourteen: Antigo and Chapter Fifteen: Coming Home Summary and Analysis

When Jack Bradley returned to the states, he eventually married Elizabeth Van Gorp, became a funeral director and bought his own funeral home in Antigo. His children only knew that he was in a famous wartime photo. Jack wouldn't talk about it and refused any interviews with the press. The children always wondered why he wouldn't talk about his experiences during the war and on Iwo Jima. After he died, their mother told them that although their father wouldn't talk about it, he had cried in his sleep for four years after they were married. Perhaps his silence was due in part to Iggy's death. James learned that his father didn't like being called a hero. He felt the heroes were the guys that didn't make it. Besides, "hero" had been morphed from its true definition to one of "star" or "celebrity." Jack Bradley did not feel like he was either.

Belle and Ed Block were notified by telegram about Harlon's death. Martha Strank insisted that the Western Union man read the telegram to her. When he did, she fainted. Within two months, her coal black hair was white. At the same time grief was hitting the families, exaltation was hitting the country which was symbolized by the photo. FDR ordered that the flag raisers be identified and participate in the war bond drive. Rene, who was the only one identified, revealed that two of the flag raisers, Mike and Franklin, were dead. Ira threatened Rene—if he identified him, he'd kill him.

Rene was treated like a star. The media pursued him for photo shoots and interviews. Under pressure, he divulged Ira's name as one of the flag raisers. He also identified Doc as being in the photo. Rene had mistakenly named Hank Hansen, instead of the deceased Franklin, as a flat raiser. On April 9th, Goldie finally received the grim news of her son's death. The neighbors, who lived a quarter-mile away, heard her screams all night. The names of the boys in the photo were publicized. Doc's father was proud but his mother didn't want her son to appear immodest. The Bradleys had to live with the false rumor that Jack had lost his leg—a miscommunication about the shrapnel injuries he received to his legs.

Rene was the only boy who loved the limelight but never got the satisfaction he hoped for. The first sign of disappointment was when a parade to honor him was canceled. It was understandable that it was canceled and FDR had just died but it was never rescheduled. Rene, Jack and Ira met up again in Washington, D.C. by Presidential order—they were to have a private meeting with President Truman. Ira told Marine representatives that it was Harlon Block in the picture and not Hansen. He was told him to keep his mouth shut since all the publicity had already gone out. Ira did not kill Rene but he would not speak to him either. The public was never aware of the rift and they

referred to the trio simply as "the heroes." The President greeted them and thanked them for the important work they were going to do on behalf of the war bond drive.



# Chapter Sixteen: The Bond Tour and Chapter Seventeen: A Conflict of Honor

## Chapter Sixteen: The Bond Tour and Chapter Seventeen: A Conflict of Honor Summary and Analysis

The war chest was anemic. The war bond drive needed to raise 14 billion dollars. The AP donated the famous photo to the government, all proceeds would go to a sailors' retirement fund. The sculptor Felix de Weldon began work on a sculpture based on the photo. Rosenthal won a Pulitzer Prize. The tour began in New York City for two days that were crammed with appearances. Mayor LaGuardia unveiled the five-story statue in front of thousands of New Yorkers. All three rejected the media's attempts to portray them as heroes. Ira was unhappy with the ordeal and began drinking quite a bit.

The bereaved mothers of the fallen heroes appeared at one ceremony. Jack gave Hank Hansen's mother his watch which he had slipped off when he died in his arms. The Wall Street broker-dealer organization announced that they were donating \$1 billion dollars to the drive. Ira was drunk during the entire Chicago appearance after which he was sent back to active duty. After eight weeks, the nation-wide tour ended. The tour had doubled expectations, bringing in \$26.3 billion. A commemorative stamp was issued of the flag raisers. Like it or not, John would always be part of that iconic event. President Truman was shocked by the estimated casualties that America would suffer to continue waging war against Japan. What could he do to circumvent all the predicted American losses?

The Blocks moved to Loma Linda, California, where the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was prominent. Belle still was certain that her son was in the flag raising photo. Germany had surrendered. The Allied Powers met in Potsdam, Germany, to plan the end of the Pacific War. A conventional war strategy would produce a million lost Americans. In the Potsdam Declaration, the Allied Powers warned Japan to surrender or face destruction. Japan ignored the warning and soon the Enola Gay was passing over Iwo Jima and heading towards Hiroshima.

Jack had more treatments for his injuries but as soon as he could he returned to Appleton where he married Elizabeth a short while later. Ira fulfilled his commitment to the Marines and was discharged in December 1945. He continued to have drinking problems. He hitchhiked to Texas to meet Harlon's father who was estranged from Belle. Ira told Ed that it was Harlon in the photo. Belle who had been right all along. Rene hoped to become a police officer but did not qualify. He married Pauline and returned to work at the mill. The three flag raisers were invited to a patriotic celebration several years later. John declined but Rene and Ira accepted. Rene complained about his inability to get a good job—inferring that he thought he was entitled to a break after being such a hero. Ira complained about discrimination against the Indians in Arizona. Reacting to a letter from Belle, the Marines investigated Ira's claim that it was Harlon



and not Hank in the photo. After a thorough review, the Marines Corps issued an official announcement proclaiming that Harlon Block was the sixth soldier in the photo.



# **Chapter Eighteen: Movies and Monuments and Chapter Nineteen: Casualties of Wa**

## **Chapter Eighteen: Movies and Monuments and Chapter Nineteen: Casualties of Wa Summary and Analysis**

Several years after the flag-raising event, the press continued to follow the lives of the boys. Rene was still at the mill. Ira was deteriorating—drinking and getting arrested. Jack was working at a funeral home. Harlon and Franklin received military funerals in their hometowns. Mike was buried at Arlington. The boys were asked to participate in a John Wayne movie, "The Sands of Iwo Jima." They raised a flag at the end of the movie but the movie had very little to do with the actual battle that took place. The statue of the flag raising by sculptor de Weldon was unveiled at Arlington National Cemetery in late 1954. The huge statue impressed everyone. After the ceremony, the three boys went their own way and would never again meet.

In December 1954, Ira was arrested for drunk and disorderly for the fifty-first time. After a drunken poker game, Ira was found dead the next morning. The coroner attributed his death to exposure to the cold and alcohol poisoning. Ira was finally at peace and was given a hero's funeral and was buried at Arlington. Rene had only one child who told James Bradley that his father's heroism had been schizophrenic where he was invited to be in a parade one day and working in the mill the next. In 1979, Rene was working as a janitor. He died of a heart attack while on the job. He was interred at Arlington.



# Chapter Twenty: Common Virtue

## Chapter Twenty: Common Virtue Summary and Analysis

Jack declined reunions of Easy Company since he knew that he would get unwanted attention. When James was nine and his class was studying WWII, his teacher told the class that James' father was a hero. When he asked his father about it that night, he told him that the heroes were the guys that did not come back. At sixteen, James again broached the taboo subject. Jack recounted the story of his missing friend Iggy, confirming that his friend's torture and death had placed a pallor over war that never left. Jack's death in 1994 made headlines around the world as the last flag raiser had died. Jack was buried with the photograph that meant to the most to him, which was a picture of his family.



# Characters

## Jack Bradley

Jack "Doc" Bradley was one of the six Marines who hoisted the American flag on Iwo Jima during the Pacific phase of World War II. The story first finds Jack growing up in an idyllic neighborhood in Appleton, Milwaukee. He and his four siblings were raised by his protective father and devout Catholic mother.

When Jack was just eighteen, World War II was raging in Europe. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, America could only respond with full engagement. It was then that Jack's father advised him to join the Navy and thus avoid getting drafted and being sent into combat. Little did either one know that the path Jack would take with the Navy would land him in one of the most brutal battles in U.S. history.

Just like the other five flag raisers, Jack just happened onto the scene when a make-shift flagpole affixed with an American flag was to be hoisted atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. An AP photographer, Joe Rosenthal, was embedded with the Marines. He just got off one shot when Jack and the five other boys raised the flag. Rosenthal knew that the one shot could turn out blurred or in poor quality. Of course, as it turned out, it became one of the most iconic images in all of U.S. history. Although the battle on Iwo Jima was far from over when that flag was raised, the image gave a fearful nation both hope and inspiration.

Jack rejected any talk of heroism about his role in the photo. Ultimately, he refused all requests for interviews and appearances. To Jack, he was no hero. The heroes were the men who fought for their country and did not get to come home.

## Mike Strank

Mike Strank was born in Czechoslovakia. When he was just an infant, his father immigrated to America for a better job opportunity. His father settled in Franklin Borough, Pennsylvania, where he worked in the iron mines three years before he could afford to send for his wife and the three-year-old Mike. Mike Strank grew to be a muscular and hulking man who was a natural born leader. He would often act as intermediary between his father and younger brothers. This was a role he would repeat when he became a sergeant in the Marines.

Of the six flag raisers in the iconic photograph taken in Iwo Jima, at twenty-four year old, Mike Strank was the old man of the group. Mike's exemplary behavior and actions as a Sergeant was an inspiration to his men who thought of Mike as a real "Marine's Marine." Mike was strong and very bright but above all, he was a real leader and did not expect his men to do anything he would not do.



Mike, like the other five flag raisers, happened just upon the event. He had been sent up Mount Suribachi with a small group of men to set up a communications line. He and the others all helped to lift the heavy make-shift pole—made from a discarded pipe—that had the American flag affixed to its top. Just when the flag pole was almost upright, Joe Rosenthal, an embedded AP photographer, snapped the photo that would become an inspiration and a symbol of hope and victory to a fearful nation.

As the fates would have it, Mike lived only for a short time after the flag-raising event. He was leading his men through some rugged terrain and was shot dead by a Japanese sniper. He was honored as a hero and buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

## **Franklin Sousley**

Franklin Sousley was born in Hilltop, Kentucky. His parents were struggling tobacco farmers. When Franklin got word that he was being drafted by the Army, he joined the Marines. He was one of the six flag-raisers on Iwo Jima. He was killed shortly after the flag-raising event.

## **Harlon Block**

Harlon Block, was born in Rio Grande Valley, Texas. Harlon was a high school football player when he and his teammates all decided to join the Marines. He was one of the six flag raisers on Iwo Jima. He did not make it off the island alive.

## **Ira Hayes**

Ira Hayes was born on the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. Ira joined the Marines when he was 19 years old and became one of the six flag raisers on Iwo Jima. He had difficulties after returning from active duty. He was arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct at least 50 times. He died when he was just 32 years old.

## **Rene Gagnon**

Rene Gagnon was born in Manchester, New Hampshire, of French-Canadian parents. After receiving his draft notice, seventeen-year-old Rene joined the Marines because he liked their uniform. Rene was one of the six flag raisers on Iwo Jima. He was one of the three flag raisers who lived and returned home after the war.

## **Belle Block**

When Belle Block saw the photograph of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima, she was sure that the one Marine was her son, Harlon, even though she could only see his back. Harlon died shortly after the photograph was taken and another dead soldier was incorrectly



identified in Harlon's place as a flag raiser. Belle stuck to her belief that Harlon was in the photograph and was proved right several years later.

## **Betty Bradley**

Betty married Jack Bradley after he returned from Iwo Jima. Although Jack was steadfast about not discussing his experiences in Iwo Jima or the flag-raising event, years later Betty told her children that Jack cried in his sleep for four years following his return.

## **General Kuribayashi**

General Kuribayashi led the Japanese forces on Iwo Jima. He instructed each of his men to kill ten Americans before they died. General Kuribayashi's body was never found but he was presumed dead as his headquarters on the island was blown to bits.

## **Goldie Sousley**

When Goldie Sousley received the telegram advising her that her son, Franklin, had been killed in the line of duty, neighbors who lived a quarter-mile away heard her screams and cries all night long.



# Objects/Places

## The Island of Bougainville

Mike Strank fought on the Pacific island of Bougainville as part of the tough Marine unit called the Raiders. Later Ira and Harlon were both were assigned to the island and fought along Mike.

## Suribachi

Suribachi is the volcanic mountain on Iwo Jima where the Americans raised the flag that was captured by an AP photographer and became an inspiration to a weary nation.

## Iwo Jima

Iwo Jima was the small Japanese island where the young American soldiers made history and created an icon when they raised the American flag there. The battle of Iwo Jima was one of the bloodiest in American history.

## Appleton, WI

When John Bradley returned from WWII, he returned to Appleton, Wisconsin where he married his childhood sweetheart and raised eight children.

## Oakland, CA

After Jack Bradley joined the Navy, his first assignment was at a military hospital in Oakland, CA. He liked the assignment and it was right across from San Francisco but it did not last long.

## The Tarawa Atoll

The Marines handed the Imperial Japanese Navy its first defeat on the tiny atoll of Tarawa. Although American casualties were high, the soldiers were finally able to declare victory and take the atoll which was a moral and strategic victory.

## Washington, D.C.

The three surviving flag raisers were ordered back to Washington, D.C., by President Truman. They were assigned to lead the national war bond drive in which \$26 billion dollars was raised for the war chest.



## **San Diego, CA**

The six young Marines who would become the flag raisers on Iwo Jima were first met in San Diego where they trained for months in readiness for the battle of Iwo Jima that lay ahead of them.

## **The Enola Gay**

As the Enola Gay flew over Iwo Jima, it tipped its wings to the site of one of the most decorated and viscous battles in U.S. military history. The Enola Gay was flying a secret mission to Hiroshima where they would drop the atomic bomb and end the Pacific War which meant the end of World War II.

## **New York City**

When the three surviving flag raisers were ordered back to the United States to lead the war bond drive, the first city on their tour was New York City. The boys were given a hero's welcome and had three days crammed with interviews and appearances.





# Themes

## Heroes

One of the most difficult things about his war experience for Jack Bradley to deal with appeared to be his being labeled a hero. In Jack's mind, the heroes were not the six other Marines who just happened by when a flag needed to be hoisted up on a make-shift flag pole. The real heroes, he told his son years later, were the fellows that did not make it home. These were the soldiers that gave their lives for their country and for the American way of life.

Only three of the six flag raisers made it off alive from the Japanese island of Iwo Jima. Jack Bradley's best friend in the service was Ralph "Iggy" Ignatowski. Iggy went missing and Jack searched everywhere for him. Iggy was finally found in a cave where he had obviously been tortured to death. When Jack returned to the U.S. he received a hero's welcome, with parades and interviews and photography shoots. He was bewildered that those brief and inane seconds that it took to raise the flag would get the attention it was getting when so many young men, like Iggy, gave their very lives for their country.

In Jack's heart and mind, the men like Iggy were the real heroes. As the years wore on and the media still requested interviews with him, he eventually rejected all such requests. He felt uncomfortable being treated like a hero. He was alive and got to have a family and a career while so many died before they were thirty, some even before they were twenty. Partly due to Jack's distancing himself from the event, the flag-raising photograph and sculpture came to honor all heroes of the war and not just those six who happened by and helped raise the flag.

## The Ravages of War

As the six young men who would come to be known as the flag raisers on Iwo Jima joined the Marines and Navy, the images they had of war were undoubtedly far from the reality that they would eventually come to know all too intimately. Jack Bradley, encouraged by his father, joined the Navy so he could avoid being drafted by the Army and thus avoid combat. Unbeknown to both father and son, by Jack joining the Navy he was on his way to one of the most viscous battles that the United States would ever face in its entire history.

One of the most difficult issues that the young soldiers described in "Flags of Our Fathers" had to face was the deaths of their peers. Most certainly, every man in the battle of Iwo Jima had to have private thoughts that he may not make it out alive. However, the heartache that shook the men to their very souls was seeing their young buddies die before their eyes, sometimes holding them in their arms, as they helplessly watched them die. Perhaps it is the one facet of combat training that is not adequately covered. Who can really prepare for a friend to die before one's eyes?



When Jack Bradley found his missing friend Iggy dead in a cave and obviously tortured to death, it was a turning point for him. When he returned home, it was difficult for him to talk about any aspect of the war. He finally revealed to his son James that he was so demoralized when he found his dead friend, that he began to abhor the war. The misery that the men lived through and the atrocities that they witnessed was truly what war was about. When Jack returned home, his wife said he cried every night in his sleep for four years. Jack would not talk about his experiences but they came out at night when he could not stop them.

## Symbolism

When the United States was in the throes of World War II, there was much despair and fear in the country. Most everyone knew someone who was in the war and many knew soldiers who had died. The navy of Imperial Japan had attacked the homeland. The mighty Japanese Navy was powerful. It had been at war against China for ten years and was experienced and fearless. The Japanese Navy and Army both taught their soldiers to give their lives for their Emperor—they were taught in the rigorous traditions of the ancient samurai. Hope was fading. How could America stand-up to such a force?

As it turned out the Marines were up to the challenge. After a year of intense training, which focused on operating amphibious vehicles, an armada of 800 plus ships with 100,000 men converged upon the tiny island. The battle of Iwo Jima was fierce and one of the bloodiest battles in history but in the early days of the battle of Iwo Jima, the iconic photograph of the six Marines hoisting the make-shift flagpole with the American flag affixed on top emerged as a symbol of hope and victory that inspired the entire nation.

Although the battle on the small island was far from over when that image was transmitted around the world, it was in a way a turning point in the war. The six young men, three of whom would not leave the island alive, helped to hoist the flag that became an inspiration to a tired and weary nation. Even though the battle waged on, the image of the flag raisers symbolized victory and the bright hope for peace. President Truman dispatched the surviving flag raisers to head the war bond campaign. The goal was to raise \$14 billion. The tour brought in \$26 billion and the inspired nation paid its respect to these men who symbolized all the brave men fighting to protect the American way of life.



# Style

## Perspective

"Flags of Our Fathers" is written in the third-person narrative. The author of the book, James Bradley, is the son of one of the six Marines who hoisted the make-shift flagpole affixed with an American flag atop Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima during World War II. A photo of the event became one of the most iconic images in the history of America. At first blush, one would think that James Bradley would be at a great advantage in writing this book because his father was one of the principal characters. Not so in this case. Jack "Doc" Bradley virtually refused to talk with anyone about his experiences or about the flag-raising event that made him a national hero. What compelled James Bradley to write the story was his father's silence about it. Why did his father refuse to talk, even to his own family, about the incident? What were the stories of the other five flag raisers and how did the event and the battle in Iwo Jima impact their lives?

James Bradley wanted to pay appropriate respect to these men and honor them not so much for being in the photograph but for fighting for their country and laying their lives on the line for the freedom of others. It was with great care that James Bradley approached the story. He read every account he could get his hands on and interviewed every person who had any information about the battle on Iwo Jima or the flag-raising event and its aftermath.

With great enthusiasm and diligence for detail and truthfulness, James Bradley provided a tribute not only to his father and the other five flag raisers, but to all the brave soldiers, many of whom died or were severely wounded, who fought in an epic battle to save the country and preserve the American way of life.

## Tone

The title of the first chapter of "Flags of Our Fathers" is "Sacred Ground" and apt. That sentiment sets the tone for the entire book. The story of the six young flag raisers on Iwo Jima is told with reverence and respect. The iconic photo of that flag-raising came to symbolize hope and inspiration in a nation that had lost hope and was fearful of the threats of the World War that raged on.

Author James Bradley, son of one of the flag raisers, took great care to tell the real stories of the six young and unsuspecting Marines who would forever become part of history. Bradley read every book he could find on Iwo Jima, the Pacific War and the flag raising event and its aftermath. He interviewed every available person that had knowledge of the battle and flag raising event. Bradley carefully tied together the stories of the six young men, ranging from eighteen to twenty-four, to honor them appropriately for their part in protecting the country and for putting their lives on the line.



The focus was not so much on those brief seconds that these men were asked to hoist up the make-shift flag pole affixed with the American flag but on the bloody battle from which they could not escape and on the effects the war and the flag-raising event had on these men that lasted a life time.

## Structure

The book, "Flags of Our Fathers" is separated into twenty chapters. Following the story is an "Acknowledgments" section in which author James Bradley thanks various contributors to the book. There is also a "Bibliography" that acknowledges various published material that Bradley and his co-author, Ron Powers, used as references in completing their account of the events surrounding the flag raising in Iwo Jima. A "Photo Credits" section lists the sources of the photos used in the book. An "Index" lists major subjects for easy references for the readers.

The book is presented in a basically straight forward manner. However, the very first chapter precedes the actual story of Iwo Jima and the famous flag raising by describing the reasons why the author was compelled to pursue the story about his father and the other five soldiers who were in the iconic picture that will be part of American history forever. Thereafter, the story of the six flag raisers remains in chronological order and begins with each man's childhood and background and the circumstances that led them to be on Iwo Jima in what would prove to be one of the bloodiest battles in US history. After telling the story of the horrific battle and the circumstances of the famous photograph being taken, the author provides an account of the aftermath of the event and how the lives of the men involved were changed forever.



## Quotes

"The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know" (Chapter 1, pg. 1.)

"Haven't had any soap or water since I hit the beach. I never knew I could go without food, water or sleep for three days but I know now, it can be done" (Chapter 1, pg. 4.)

"What kind of people do they [Japanese] think we are? Is it possible they do not realize that we shall never cease to persevere against them until they have been taught a lesson which they and the world will never forget?" Chapter 3, pg. 29.)

"Adolph Hitler was the enemy we feared, and Japan was dismissed as a less significant threat. But after the 'day of infamy' newspaper maps of the Pacific and Asia were scrutinized at the kitchen tables of America" (Chapter 3, pg. 30.)

"Now Kuribayashi wanted Washington to blanch at the prospect of a later invasion of the Japanese home islands and instead would want to negotiate a peace with Japan. To this end, Kuribayashi had instructed his men to 'kill ten Americans before you die'" (Chapter 6, pg. 66.)

"Somehow overcame terror and scared young men under sheets of deadly fire kept on doing the basic, gritty tasks that they'd practiced over and over in training" (Chapter 7, pg. 78.)

"Amid another night of star shells, flares, and searchlights forming eerie shadows on Suribachi's sides, a Japanese mortar shell hit a Marine ammunition dump on the beach. The explosion lit up the sky for an hour" (Chapter 8, pg. 89.)

"The press substituted romanticism for good reporting. Inflated stories of heroism made for better copy than the plain facts" (Chapter 12, pg. 122.)

"The real story, as Dad saw it, was simple and unadorned: A flag needed to be replaced. The pole was heavy. The sun was just right. A chance shot turned an unremarkable act into a remarkable photograph" (Chapter 14, pg. 144.)

"My father was not listening to the news that his identity would never again be his own, that it would remain, in some irretrievable way, the property of the nation. He would not be able to leave the image—the image would not leave him. Like it or not, he would always be a figure in the photograph." (Chapter 16, page 167)

"After the ceremony, the three flag raisers prepared to take their leave of one another. Never again would they meet, never again would they serve the photograph" (Chapter 18, pg. 187.)

"He said, 'I want you to always remember something. The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back'" (Chapter 20, pg. 195.)



## Topics for Discussion

What was Japan's strategy for attacking Pearl Harbor? Why did Japan feel superior to America militarily? Why was the Pacific front of World War II referred to as "America's War?"

Why did Jack Bradley join the Navy? What was Jack's first assignment that made him believe he would not see combat? What responsibility did Jack have on Iwo Jima?

Why was the photo of the flag raising by Joe Rosenthal misleading? How did America react to it? What was actually going on in Iwo Jima?

What was one of the major reasons Jack Bradley never wanted to talk about Iwo Jima and the flag raising? Who did Jack Bradley feel were the real heroes of the Iwo Jima battle?

Of the six flag raisers on Iwo Jima, who left injured, who was buried there and who left with no major injuries? What confusion existed about the identity of the actual six flag raisers?

Why was Ira pulled off the war bond tour and returned to active duty? What happened to Ira Hayes after he returned home from active duty? What caused Ira's problems?

What was Bell Block's reaction when she first saw the photo of the flag raising? How did the Block family learn that Harlon was actually one of the flag raisers?