

“When I Come Back, I’ll Be A Hero”

A GM Moraine employee, and the difference he made in one of the bloodiest battles in World War II.

By Randy Ingram

Did you know that Moraine Assembly can trace its roots back to 1917? And in terms of longevity, we are one of the oldest, active workforces in the nation. Originally, we built fighter planes for the war effort in World War I. Then, after GM bought the facility in 1921, we became Frigidaire and built home appliances until 1979. And for the last 21 years it's been trucks and SUVs. Tens of thousands of workers have passed through our gates, each with a different and unique life story to tell. Recently, the exploits of one such co-worker have come to light. It's an inspiring yet sad story of one young man who worked here a long time ago whose life had a tremendous impact on all our lives. We have seen his picture countless times but none of us ever knew who he was – until now. His life, his beliefs and values, what he experienced and gave of himself, are a lesson we as Americans all need to remember. This is his story.



Everyone has seen the now famous photograph of the three firemen hoisting Old Glory over the ruins of The World Trade Center. Much has been said about its resemblance to the most famous photograph ever taken; the flag raising on Iwo Jima during World War II. This picture captured the nation's hearts at the peak of the war, in March 1945. It was to us, symbolic of the whole war and the embodiment of the American fighting spirit. It's image the very essence of heroism and determination. It has continued to inspire the American people to this day. The men were instantly immortalized, though their identities were unknown. It became the subject of three movies and numerous books. A huge monument depicting this 1/400th of a second is visited each year by thousands in our nation's capitol.

But who were these men? What were their names? Where were they from? While reading this book, a little, long forgotten fact about one particular flag-raiser has come to light. The second man from the left in this blurred and indistinct, yet unforgettable image is Franklin R. Sousley and he is our aforementioned co-worker. It's true. One of the men immortalized in bronze in Arlington National Cemetery, who fought in perhaps the most horrific battle in our nation's history - is one of us! Tragically, this unique American tale does not have a happy ending. 26 long and grueling days later as the Battle of Iwo Jima was reaching it's fateful and inevitable climax, Franklin Sousley was killed in combat. Today he rests virtually forgotten outside his community in a rural Kentucky cemetery.

Over the next several weeks we will share with you his story. A debt of gratitude is owed to authors James Bradley and Bill D. Ross for their authoritative works on this subject.

There were six of them, though only four are visible. On the far right, planting the flagpole in some rocks he had gathered is Harlon Block of Texas, a star football player who enlisted in the Marines along with all the seniors on his high school team. Between Harlon and Franklin is John Bradley, a Navy medic from Wisconsin who would win The Navy Cross for Bravery and then stuff the medal in a closet, never telling his family of it's existence. On the far left of the picture, reaching but never quite able to grasp the pole is Arizona's Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian. His whole life would be like that; always reaching, never grasping. The two men on the other side are barely discernible in the photo. Rene Gagnon of New Hampshire would forever try to capitalize on his newfound fame, only to see each lucky break somehow slip through his fingers. And Sergeant Mike Strank, whose only visible feature is

his right hand helping Franklin's steady the pole. Mike Strank, the old man at age 24, a Marine's Marine whose birthday was the same date the Marine Corps was founded. His men absolutely idolized him. He would always teach them not just how to kill the enemy, but would also say, "Listen to me, and I'll get you home to your mothers." And then there is Franklin Sousley from Hilltop, Kentucky, second from the left. Although this story will center primarily on his life, it would be very difficult to tell Franklin's story without telling that of the others.

The second of three sons, Franklin Runyon Sousley came into this world on September 19, 1925. The Sousleys were poor, as were most people living through the Great Depression. There was electricity but indoor plumbing was only something to dream about. Mostly life was about work, hard work, usually tobacco, but also putting up hay and milking the cows for they provided milk for the family. His older brother died in his mother's arms of appendicitis when Franklin was just three. Now, he and his mother Goldie drew particularly close as she sought to find solace in him over his brother's passing.



Franklin Sousley, at about age 6.

In 1931, Franklin began his education in a two-room schoolhouse in nearby Tea Run, and later a larger schoolhouse in Elizaville. In just three years his father died of diabetes. Now age nine, he became the man of the house and his mother became even more emotionally dependent upon him. In school, Franklin was academically perfect - all C's. With chores before school and work around the farm till dark, there was little time for studying or after school athletics. It wasn't an easy life but those who remember him best recall a boy with a quick and ready smile, who loved to hunt and fish in the Licking River nearby. And he loved that farm, saying it was his dream to someday return there and live out his years.

Upon graduation Franklin came north. Dayton was by then a bustling wartime town with plenty of opportunities for someone willing to put in a hard day's work. He found his way to Frigidaire Plant 2 on Springboro Pike, working as a staker and assembler on the propeller line. During the week he stayed in an apartment at 107 Park Drive in East Dayton (since demolished). Weekends often found Franklin making the long trek back home to see his mother as well as his longtime sweetheart Marian Hamm. Things might have stayed that way but in December 1943 a telegram from a certain Uncle Sam changed all that - he had been drafted. Instead of going into the Army, Franklin opted, like a lot of young men his age, to join The Marine Corps.

December 7, 1941 came as a shock to America. When Japanese bombs rained down on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on that sleepy Sunday morning, The United States was an isolationist nation wanting no part in another European war. Franklin and his Mom were down at the barn milking the family cows that evening before church when word came. He knew it meant nothing less than war. Three days later Adolph Hitler, vowing our destruction, declared war on The United States. Now there was no turning back. America would have to fight two major wars at the same time. The task of taking on Nazi Germany was primarily assigned to the U.S. Army while that of stopping the Japanese onslaught across the South Pacific was handed to the Marine Corps and Navy.

Japan in the first half of the 20th century was a vastly different nation than the one we now know. They had already been at war for ten years, first invading Manchuria and then China in 1937. Through a series of political maneuverings and assassinations, the military seized power and began drawing up

plans as far back as 1925 for a war with America. Japan envied the United States and its vast natural resources, of which they had very little. The Japanese considered themselves a superior race, a nation of warriors and felt it was their destiny to dominate The Pacific and Far East.

The military set out to alter the very structure of Japanese society. Schools became boot camps, the teachers - drill sergeants. Free thought and open critical discussion were prohibited. The children were taught to hate America at a very early age (sound familiar?). Japan explained its conquests as a crusade to rid Asia of white colonial rule. In fact, those they claimed to be freeing were enslaved by one of the most brutal, barbaric regimes in history. When China's capitol, Nanking, fell in 1937, the Japanese Army committed unspeakable atrocities against its unarmed civilian population, raping, torturing and murdering 350,000 of its citizens in less than two months! Allied soldiers captured by Nazi Germany died at a rate of 1.1 % during the war. The death rate of prisoners held by the Japanese was a staggering 37%.



Franklin Sousley, the day he left hilltop, never to return.

The first land encounter between U.S. forces and those of Japan occurred on Guadalcanal in August 1942. The atrocities against our soldiers were well documented: torture, mutilation and cannibalism. Yes, they were even eating us, but they couldn't beat us. In December Guadalcanal fell to The Marines at a cost of 23,000 Japanese lives. It was a stunning and bitter defeat for Emperor Hirohito's master race.

Three of Iwo Jima's flag raisers saw their first action on Bouganville, the next stop on what came to be known as America's island hopping campaign across the Pacific. Sergeant Mike Strank, the coal miner's son from Pennsylvania, Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian and Harlon Block, the All-State football player from Texas; all had their baptism under fire here. "Bloody Bouganville" they came to call it. Knowing we always took our fallen comrades from the battlefield, the Japanese took to driving stakes through their corpses. When the Marines came back, they were in turn shot as they struggled to remove their bodies. One soldier found his own brother like that. After six months of sporadic, often intense fighting, Bouganville collapsed under the Marines' relentless attacks. While Franklin was just entering boot camp, Mike, Harlon and Ira were sailing for home as changed men. They were battle veterans now. They had now seen the bloody visage of death firsthand and the idealistic concept of war lost all of its glory. Images of horror they could scarcely comprehend now invaded their thoughts and tortured their minds. Mike Strank and Harlon Block were now firmly convinced they would not survive their next battle.

Franklin meanwhile, set about proving himself during the seemingly endless weeks of boot camp at Camp Pendleton near San Diego. While laughing off a lot of good natured ribbing over his thick Kentucky drawl, he did admit to some feelings of loneliness in letters written to his mother Goldie. "I believe I am homesick for once in my life. If you had treated me mean before I left, it wouldn't be so hard to forget. But you were so good that when they (the Drill Instructors) start raving around here, I think of home."

And indeed, Hilltop, Kentucky was abuzz when the lanky, freckle faced Marine returned home after boot camp for a much-welcomed rest. "He stepped off that train in his Marine dress blues looking straight as a string," remarked a childhood friend. He seemed bigger now too. On his last night home Franklin did what a lot of soldiers do before going off to war. He asked his sweetheart Marion to wait

for him. Too excited to sleep after she said she would, Franklin sat on the front porch of the Hilltop General Store until 3 A.M., reminiscing with friends about the good old days and talking about how great it was to be a Marine.

Sad farewells were exchanged at the train station the next morning as Franklin prepared to leave. Goldie just didn't want to let her boy go. After a long, tearful hug, he looked directly into his mother's weary eyes and promised her, "Momma, I'm gonna do something to make you proud of me." And his last words to Marion before boarding the train to Maysville were "When I come back, I'll be a Hero

Harlon Block, Mike Strank and Ira Hayes were also home on leave. All three had changed; they were more subdued and somber now. In fact, Mike and Harlon set about telling family and friends their final goodbyes. Seated in a quiet little café in Weslaco, Texas, Harlon stoically confided to a friend, "I don't think I'll be coming back. I've had my chances and I think my number will be up next time." And upon leaving a war movie in the coal mining town of Franklin Borough, Pennsylvania, Mike Strank softly remarked to a couple he was with, "It isn't really like that." His father went so far as to urge him to seek out and secure a job stateside, perhaps as a Drill Instructor. Mike, the oldest of three brothers replied, "Dad, there's a war going on out there. Young boys are fighting that war. And Dad. . .they need my help." His father never saw his son again.

Franklin was assigned to the newly created Fifth Division, some 21,000 strong whose purpose was to offset the staggering losses incurred in the war so far. The latest struggle took place on the island of Tarawa, where 4,400 Marines were lost in three days, while wiping out the entire Japanese garrison of 5,000.

The eventual flag-raisers all came together at Camp Pendleton, becoming a part of Company E – nicknamed Easy Company. For six long months, day after day, week after week – they trained. Eventually, the Fifth would become the most highly trained division in the history of the Marine Corps, yet would fight in only one battle. On September 19, 1943, The Marines set sail for Hawaii. It was Franklin Sousley's 19th birthday.

Advanced Infantry Training, or A.I.T. as they like to call it, is basically boot camp after boot camp – except the bullets are real and the training more difficult. Franklin found himself at Camp Tarawa, a 40,000 acre cattle ranch nestled in the rugged foothills of the island of Hawaii. Thick volcanic ash from two nearby volcanoes covered everything. Hardly a paradise, The Red Cross deemed the site unsuitable for prisoners of war; which was perfect for the Marine Corps. Easy Company would spend the next four months here, honing their skills at beach landings, climbing down the sides of ships into landing craft and maneuvering under fire. And they still did not know where they were going. It was October 1943.

The huge armada that finally made it's way southwest from Hawaii was 70 miles long and contained 500 ships. Some 100,000 Marine and Navy personnel would sail 4,000 miles over the next three weeks before reaching their target, a tiny, desolate island 650 miles south of Tokyo Bay called Iwo Jima. Barely five miles in length and shaped somewhat like an upside down pork chop, Iwo Jima is dominated on it's southern tip by a huge inactive volcano named Mt. Suribachi. The island's surface is quite similar to what one might find on the moon. Barren, rocky and virtually void of vegetation, a thick sulphur ash coats everything and is several feet deep in some places along the beach. But to both sides, Iwo Jima represented something much larger. To the Americans, it was a staging point for the

forces of freedom's inevitable invasion of Japan; for the Japanese, it was home soil, sacred ground that had been a part of Japan's empire for over 4,000 years. To the Japanese, an invasion of Iwo Jima was an attack on Japan itself.

The Japanese began fortifying Iwo Jima in May, 1944 when the Emperor himself hand-picked General Tadamichi Kuribayashi to head up the island's defense. The General knew he could not possibly win the battle. Instead, his effort would be to kill as many Marines as possible, and shock the war weary American public into not supporting an invasion of Japan. This technique was later used to great affect in turning the tide of public opinion against the Vietnam War. His strategy was to let

The Marines land unopposed, and once the beaches were clogged with men and equipment, annihilate them.



This was the picture that the Marines met with on the beach at Iwo Jima.

The defense of the entire island was designed towards this goal. Over 750 blockhouses and pillboxes manned by 22,000 Japanese were neatly camouflaged into the landscape, each one strategically located so as to have overlapping fields of fire and support. Months were spent setting up and sighting the myriad machine gun, mortar and artillery pieces. General Kuribayashi brought in the best fortification specialists in the Japanese Army. Quarry experts, mining engineers and labor battalions worked around the clock to devise a complex system of underground tunnels and caves, Sixteen miles in length and five stories deep.

There were 1,500 underground rooms, electricity and ventilation, even a hospital. He could shuttle entire units of men from one end of the island to the other in minutes. The Big problem facing the Marines wasn't so much the fact that there were 22,000 Japanese on Iwo Jima. The Japanese were inside Iwo Jima; manning an underground fortress, the most heavily defended piece of real estate on the planet. The General even went so far as to tell his men they were all going to die, but before they did they each must kill ten Americans. These are the opponents that awaited Franklin Sousley and the men of Easy Company. The stage was now set for one of the bloodiest and most heroic battles of the 20th century.

D-Day February 19, 1945 - Over 70,000 Marines were massed in their landing crafts, hurtling towards their destiny in wave after wave along a two mile beachhead. 72 straight days of naval and aerial bombardment, the longest of the war, had just concluded dropping 5,800 tons of bombs on Iwo's surface. 2,600-pound shells from our biggest battleships sailed overhead. At 9:05 the first Amtraks hit the beach, taking only light small arms fire. Men and machine instantly bogged down in the soft, sucking, volcanic cinders. The Japanese held their fire. More men and equipment were hitting the beach now, units were starting to form up. Still...they waited. Easy company landed with the twelfth wave near the base of Mt. Suribachi at 9:55. There were now 6,200 men strung out along a 3,000-yard beachhead. That's roughly two Marines for every yard of shoreline.

And then the entire island exploded. Bullets, mortars and artillery shells fell in cascades from hundreds of concealed positions, shredding the ranks of the stunned Marines. The landing zone became a

maelstrom of death. There was nowhere to hide. Digging a foxhole was almost impossible. As soon as a shovel-full was scooped out the hole filled up again. And still the assault waves kept coming. One Amtrak took a direct hit, instantly immolating those on board. The noise from all those guns and the constant explosions rose to a point where it became one loud, deafening roar. One Marine commented that it was so loud it seemed almost like a perfect silence. A lot of the wounded waiting on the beach to be evacuated were blown to bits.



The flamethrower was used extensively in the caves of Iwo Jima, since the Japanese would rarely surrender.

The twisted carcasses of destroyed tanks and landing craft littered the beach, many blocking the way of the incoming assault craft. And still they came, wave after wave. Some tanks, desperately trying to break free of the beachhead, crushed many of the surviving wounded. There just wasn't anywhere else to go. The dead continued to pile up along the shoreline. Bodies and body parts . . . were everywhere.

Franklin and the men of Easy Company were caught on the terraces just beyond the beach. "I was very scared," Ira Hayes would later write. "I jumped clear of our boat, and about three yards away lay a dead Marine right on the water's edge, shot in the head. He hadn't begun to fight." Nineteen-year-old corpsman Danny Thomas hit the beach several steps behind his best friend, Chick Harris. "I was charging ahead and saw Chick on the beach, facing out to sea, his back to the battle." But something just didn't seem quite right. He appeared to be standing erect but only his head and torso were visible. It was as if he were buried waist deep in the sand. As he raced past, Thomas shouted a greeting to his friend. Harris was looking directly at him and managed only a feeble wave with his hand. It was only after he was past that Thomas realized what he had just seen. His best friend since boot camp had been cut in half and through some cruel twist of fate was in those few brief agonizing moments just before he died. Only later did his commanders discover that Chick Harris was just fifteen years old.

Heroes were dropping like autumn leaves from a tree. Men like John Basilone, the hero of Guadalcanal killed in a mortar blast. Basilone had just been awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor for single-handedly holding his position on that island during a Banzai attack, and killing nearly a hundred of the enemy in the process. He could have stayed stateside training troops and selling war bonds. Basilone decided he would rather stay with his men. Today he rests in Arlington National Cemetery. One can only wonder what was racing through Franklin's mind at this point. No doubt thinking he would never see his mother or home again, like most of the men on this God-Awful island, scratching and clawing, bleeding and dying for every inch of real estate. It was now becoming horribly obvious that the seventy two-day bombardment was a complete waste of time. The Japanese were dug in and ready to fight to the death. They were well concealed and surrounded by tons of rock and concrete. Up against all this, all the Marines had for protection were their khaki shirts.

By 10:46 Franklin and the other survivors of Easy Company had worked their way up over the terraces and were moving inland, albeit at a snails pace. They were a part of the 28th Regiment, whose task was to cut across the island at the base of Mt. Suribachi, isolating it from the rest of the island. Suribachi and its 2000 Japanese defenders had to be taken if the Marines were to have any hope of winning this battle.

And so it went, yard after bloody yard throughout the entire day. They crept and crawled, dodged and ducked, slithered and staggered – and kept moving forward. Typically, when a blockhouse or concealed machine gun was attacked, units of Marines, widely spaced, would rush towards the emplacement along the edge of its field of fire. Many were cut down in the process, but usually a couple survivors could get close enough to use a grenade or flame-thrower to kill its inhabitants. Then they would move on to the next one.

Uncommon valor was a common virtue on Iwo Jima. In fact, more medals for bravery in action were awarded on Iwo Jima than any other battle in our nation's history. One such honor went to Tony Stein, a native of Dayton. Having fashioned a weapon from a machine gun off a fighter plane, he charged pillbox after pillbox, killing upwards of twenty Japanese at close range. Running out of ammo, he scurried to the beach and back eight times, each time shooting up an enemy position and taking a wounded comrade back with him. Tony Stein was the first man on Iwo Jima awarded The Medal of Honor. He was killed ten days later, having never learned of his citation for bravery.

As the sun mercifully sat on this first day, 556 mothers had lost their sons. Another 1,755 moms had boys who were grievously wounded, many crippled or maimed for life. The Battle of Iwo Jima would last another thirty-five days.

Easy Company had it pretty good for awhile on Day Two, being held in reserve in case of counterattack. There were now 33,000 Marines on the island, and the 28th Regiment, some 3,000 strong, was now attacking Mt. Suribachi. Moving out around four o'clock, Easy Company soon came under heavy fire. At one point, Franklin, Mike, Harlon and Ira helped rescue five gravely wounded buddies by dragging them into a trench. A tank was then directed over the ditch, which loaded the wounded up through its bottom hatch. By the end of Day Two, casualties stood at 3,500.



Easy Company had the task of hoisting the U.S. flag over Mt. Suribachi.

At 8:30 the next morning, Easy Company was on the right flank of an infantry charge against Mt. Suribachi. Mike, Franklin, Ira and Harlon were in the 2nd platoon, to the left of the 3rd platoon where John Bradley was corpsman. But the much anticipated tank support never arrived. The 28th would have to stand up and charge the most heavily fortified fortress in the history of armed conflict by themselves. Also, the Japanese weren't just on top shooting down at them; they were inside Suribachi, having carved out a seven story structure complete with electricity, ventilation and weapons of every conceivable size. Almost

a third of those Marines that fateful day would not come back.

But one by one the men began to stand up and charge; they in turn were followed by groups of twos and fours until hundreds of terrified young men were running headlong towards the enemy. Mt. Suribachi erupted in return with a hailstorm of steel, over a hundred guns raking the charging lines of infantry. Men were cut down by the dozens, but still they advanced, stalking pillbox after pillbox, turning each into a roaring furnace. The sickening stench of burnt flesh floated freely on the moist morning air.

It was here, for pulling a wounded Marine thirty yards as saturating enemy crossfire danced all around

them, that John Bradley would win The Medal of Honor. He would forever hide the medal from his family. Eventually, our tanks entered the fray and some horrific firefights near the base of the mountain broke through the Japanese lines. By day's end, 1,000 Marines were huddled around Suribachi's base, while hundreds more lay dead on the battlefield. For their actions that day, 3rd platoon became the most decorated unit in Marine Corps history: one Medal of Honor, two Navy Crosses and one Silver Star. Another seven would get the Bronze Star, while seventeen received Purple Hearts.

An all night torrential rain, while making the Marines miserable on Day Four, saved a lot of lives and enabled the embattled 28th Regiment to finally surround Mt. Suribachi. With visibility near zero and the rain coming down in sheets, the effectiveness of Japanese gunfire was greatly reduced. The fighting was slow and rife with danger but the Marines kept pushing forward, yard by miserable yard. Navy spotter planes detected the Japanese massing for a Banzai charge and called for an air strike. The Corsairs swooped in and found their target with devastating accuracy. In the eerie, momentary stillness that followed, it was Mike Strank who first leaped to his feet, shouting, "Let's show these bastards what a real Banzai is like! Easy Company. . .Charge!" With that the battle weary troops got to their feet and once again charged the waiting Japanese. The 3rd platoon also rose to join the ensuing melee. Led by 3rd platoon Sergeant Boots Thomas who repeatedly risked his life exhorting his men and directing tank fire, the Japanese defending the base of Suribachi were virtually annihilated. For Mike, Ira, Harlon and Franklin, it had been yet another day of torturous fighting; most of their buddies were gone and each had to be wondering how long until their number was up. For this day the battle-ravaged company would receive one Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, two Silver Stars and a slew of Purple Hearts. The price was paid in blood though as casualties amounted to 30% of Easy Company's strength. President Roosevelt shuddered that night at the growing casualty list, now standing at 4,574 killed and wounded. Unfortunately, it wasn't quite over just yet. A Kamikaze suicide attack a few hours later by fifty Japanese planes sank the escort carrier Bismarck Sea and knocked out the large aircraft carrier Saratoga for the remainder of the war. 717 sailors were lost in the attack. February 23, 1945 - A piece of good news today as the weather finally lets up. Men and material are pouring onto the beach now. Why, even the Generals come ashore at noon. But Day Five is looming very large for Franklin Sousley, Ira Hayes, Harlon Block, Mike Strank and Doc Bradley. Suribachi was surrounded and today must fall. Each must have awakened with a sense of dread thinking what lay before them. But it was their duty and they knew it; that's what soldiers do.

At 9:30 a couple of four-man patrols are ordered to the top. Surprisingly, both return about an hour later unscathed, one having made it all the way up to top of the volcano. The Marines are suspicious, it has to be a trap. Colonel Johnson decided to risk it and ordered a platoon to the top. 2nd platoon with Ira, Harlon, Mike and Franklin were off on a probe around the mountain's base and were unavailable. As luck would have it, what was left of 3rd platoon was closest, so they got the honor of being the first to scale Mt. Suribachi. Given a small flag they were told, "If you get to the top, put it up." Not when, but "if, you get to the top". A photographer volunteered to go along and up they went, walking, climbing, and even crawling in some places over boulders, rocks and debris. As they climbed, every Marine on the island turned to watch. Even the ships at anchor were focused on their every move, waiting for the Japanese to cut them down in a torrent of machine gun fire. "We thought it would be a slaughterhouse up on Suribachi," one Marine later remarked. "I still don't understand why we were not attacked." After making sure the area was secure and free of booby traps, 3rd platoon quickly set about getting the flag up. Everyone was still tense, it just didn't make sense that the Japs would not fight to hold the mountain. A length of drainage pipe was located among the rubble to which the flag was fastened. As three of the Marines planted the pole and Old Glory fluttered over

Japanese soil for the first time the island erupted – not in gunfire but in a deafening chorus of cheers. For a few brief moments Iwo Jima was transformed into Times Square on New Years Eve. Every Marine on the island was cheering, ships at anchor blasted their horns and some new guys even thought the battle was won.

It wasn't; the Japanese holed up inside Suribachi reacted with characteristic fanaticism. They swarmed out of their tunnels and caves, screaming and shooting; one brandishing a broken sword over his head. Grenades were going back and forth like a snowball fight. But the flag stayed up . . . and in a few minutes it was over. All the attacking Japanese were killed with no loss of American life. A few days later, over 150 dead were found inside the caves. Most had died of self-inflicted wounds.

The Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, on board a ship as an observer, had just come ashore and witnessed the events up on top of the volcano. He commented, "The raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years." Forrestal was so impressed that he decided to keep the flag for himself as a souvenir. Well, the 28th regiment was going to have no part of that; they had fought too hard to get that flag up there. Colonel Chandler Johnson ordered a replacement flag put up and the first one brought back down for safekeeping. As an afterthought, he called out to his aide, "And make it a bigger one."

The Colonel also decided it would be a good idea to have a wired field telephone on top of the mountain. Having just returned from their uneventful probe around Suribachi's base, Franklin's 2nd platoon was given the job. Although worn out from their mission, nobody complained. While gathering their equipment, they were joined by a runner, Rene Gagnon, who had the new larger flag. This flag, twice as big as the other one, had been salvaged from a sinking ship at Pearl Harbor.

While all this was going on, an Associated Press photographer by the name of Joe Rosenthal was having a bad day. He took a spill in the ocean while climbing into a landing ship and was too late to the mountain to get any pictures of the flag raising.

He ran into Bill Genaust, a Marine combat photographer with a color movie camera and Bob Campbell, another combat photographer. The three decide to go up on top of Suribachi anyway; maybe they could find a few good pictures.

Arriving on top of the mountain with their wires, telephone and flag, Sergeant Strank ordered Ira and Franklin to locate another usable length of pipe while he and Harlon cleared a spot to plant the new flag. As fate would have it, Rosenthal, Genaust and Campbell arrived on the scene at just this precise moment. It was just after noon, March 23, 1945. History was about to be made.

They noticed two Marines lugging a heavy pipe towards a third Marine holding a neatly folded flag. The plan was to simultaneously lower the first flag while the second flag went up. Bob Campbell positioned himself a little downhill to capture this moment, while Rosenthal and Genaust stood off some ninety feet away. Harlon positioned his feet over the spot he had cleared amidst the rubble, ready to plant the pipe, Genaust starts his movie camera. Mike, the 100-pound pole on his right shoulder, moves towards Harlon as Ira joins in. The flag is wrapped around the pipe to keep it from touching the ground. There was nothing ceremonial about it, they didn't even know they were being filmed.

Franklin steps up in front of Ira to help as Doc Bradley walks by with an armload of bandages. Mike

asks him to lend a hand. He drops his load and steps in front of Franklin. They are gingerly moving the pipe into position, high stepping over the debris as Rene Gagnon enters the picture from the right and joins the cluster of men as they wrestle the new flagpole into position.

Genaust, his camera rolling now, positions himself a few feet to the right of Rosenthal. “I’m not in your way am I, Joe?” he asks. We are now at the very apex of our story. “Oh no,” Rosenthal replied as he glanced over his shoulder at Genaust just to be sure. And then, out of the corner of his eye, he glimpses the flag going up. It may be too late. There’s no time to aim his camera, he just swings it up in an arc and snaps the picture.

It was 1/400 of a second, frozen in time. The greatest photograph ever taken.

A moment sooner or a split second later and we would have just another war photo. A good one to be sure, but the flag would not have been at that perfect forty five-degree angle. It’s the symmetry between the flag and the men that gives this picture its greatness. It looks like it’s going up, but we can’t be sure it’s going to make it. The men are struggling so hard to see that it does go up – and stay up. It makes us want to just dive into the picture and lend them a hand, or cheer them on. It symbolized everything that is great about America; guts, determination, teamwork, strength and most of all. . . love for that flag. Because that flag IS America.

And then it was over. The Marines drive the pipe into the ground and piled more rocks around its base, the flag flaps smartly in the breeze. Campbell and Genaust are satisfied, they got the shots they came after. Joe Rosenthal however, is less enthusiastic. As an experienced photographer, he is well aware of the odds against his photo coming out. It could be all sky, all rocks, possibly out of focus and certainly not centered. As a consolation, he gathered the remaining Marines and took a posed “gung ho” shot. Then everybody went back to work. Rosenthal packed his film up and sent it back to the states. Then he went out looking for more pictures.

In the “Gung Ho” photo you can see Franklin fourth from the left, thrusting his M1 Garand upward, it’s bayonet triumphantly piercing the cold afternoon sky. Ira Hayes is at the far left, seated. It’s the only photo known to exist in which he was actually smiling. That’s Mike Strank in front of Franklin with thumbs in pockets and Doc Bradley next to Mike waving his helmet. Everyone is quite jubilant and in high spirits. However the battle was just in its infancy and would grind on for another thirty-two days. Of the eighteen American soldiers posing in front of our nation’s flag, only four would walk off the island. And although millions will later see his film, Bill Genaust never would see his most famous piece of work. Nine days later he was killed in action. His body, sealed in a cave, was never recovered .



This was the “staged” photo that confused people about the flag raising.

The 28th regiment spent the next four days resting and licking it's wounds, having lost 510 men in the four day battle to take Suribachi. Some of them spent their time exploring caves in search of souvenirs, others wrote letters home; everyone slept. On February 27th, Franklin wrote to his mother Goldie:

Dearest Mother,

As you probably already know we hit Iwo Jima February 19th just a week ago today. My regiment took the hill with our company on the front line. The hill was hard and I sure never expected war to be like it was those first four days. I got some (bullet holes) through my clothing and I sure am happy that I am still OK.

This island is practically secured. There is some heavy fighting on one end and we are bothered some at night. Mother, you can never imagine how a battlefield looks. It sure looks horrible. I do know of at least four Japs that won't be going back to Tokyo. Look for my picture because I helped put the flag up. Please don't worry and write.

Your son,
Franklin Sousley
US Marine

A soldier will usually gloss things over for his folks back home so as not to upset and worry them. Franklin didn't dare tell her what he was really thinking, making no mention of the horrors he had witnessed firsthand to say nothing of the near paralyzing fear or the overwhelming fatigue they all had to feel. It was as if he was trying to give her a glimpse of what he was truly going through while still shielding her from that truth. It would be the last letter she would ever get from him.

"Here's one for all time," the AP photo editor told his boss. He was holding in his hand a picture just back from Iwo Jima. It was of a flag being raised after the Marines conquered Mt. Suribachi. But this picture was different; it wasn't your everyday news photo. Only one face was visible, the others were all obscured or looking away. Yet it was a masterpiece of composition and lighting. It looked very nearly like it was carved out of stone, its heroic figures larger than life. It was a portrait of everything Americans believed in: bravery, honor . . . determination.

On Sunday February 25, 1945, millions of Americans awoke to find the flag-raising picture on the front page of their newspapers. They had been following the battle of Iwo Jima very closely and the enormous casualty figures were weighing heavily on everyone's hearts. Here is a battle that has taken more of America's sons in its first 4 days than did Guadalcanal in 5 months. As they gazed upon the forms of Franklin, John, Harlon, Mike, Ira and Rene planting their country's flag down into the charred terrain of Mt. Suribachi, they are literally transfixed. Suddenly, hearts all across the fruited plain are filled with a resounding joy. Here is what we are fighting about! The public reaction is like a shockwave. Newspaper switchboards are jammed with calls requesting more copies. Special Editions hit the streets, some with the picture in color and others suitable for framing. Editorials erupt praising "this radiant image of victory," some immediately suggesting a monument in its honor as a tribute to America's fighting spirit.

Just who exactly these men were, was anybody's guess. But Joe Rosenthal became an overnight celebrity. No one back in America yet knew that this wasn't the original flag raising on Suribachi, but a replacement. Since Rosenthal was a civilian, his pictures had traveled back to the states much faster

than did Lowery's, which had to pass through military channels. When the truth did finally come out it caused a minor scandal, some critics going so far as to accuse Rosenthal of staging the entire scene. He didn't of course, and the color motion picture taken by Genoust silenced his critics.



Harlon Block

In Weslaco, Texas, Harlon Block's mother Belle was breezing through her living room when she first saw the photograph. Harlon's brother had just sat down with the morning paper. She looked over his shoulder, and pointing to the figure on the far right remarked, "Lookit, there's Harlon." Everybody thought she was crazy, but Belle was convinced that it was her son planting the flagpole in the ground.

The public also expected that with the taking of Suribachi, the high ground; the battle was all but won and would soon be winding down. So did the media, who packed up and wandered off in pursuit of their next big story. In reality the opposite was true; the firestorm of lead that was Iwo Jima was just beginning to rage.. The killing would not conclude for another thirty two days.

Wednesday, February 28, 1945 - The 28th Regiment receives orders to move out. They are going directly to the front lines on the western side of the island for the sweep north. A sense of dread soon swells through the ranks. "My 21st Birthday is coming up March 10th," uttered Boots Thomas, "but I'll never live to see it." Mike Strank was lying in a foxhole staring up at the clouds when a buddy jumped in. Sensing uneasiness, he asked what was the matter. "Oh, nothing," Mike said. "I was just wondering where we're going with all this." This spooked his friend so badly that he had to leave the foxhole. "He was talking about his death," he said years later. "Mike knew he was going to die."

Back in Weslaco, Texas, Belle Block had just opened a letter from her son Harlon.:

Dearest Mother,

Just a few lines to let you know I'm okay. I came through without a scratch. I saw Carl Sims just before we hit. He is okay. I guess you're pretty anxious to hear from me by this time. This isn't much but it's all I could get. I will write more later.

Your Loving Son,
Harlon

The next day Easy Company and the rest of the 28th Regiment plunged back into the horrible nightmare of combat in front of Nishi Ridge, an area strewn with large boulders and shallow jagged ravines. It was going to be a very bad day.

The Japanese fought like banshees, every yard gained was paid for in blood. It was the same scenario as before. Rattling machine guns, charging Marines, smoke and screams...

The stench of burning flesh was everywhere, gagging both sides. And still they kept on moving forward, almost every step leaving in its path another mother's shattered dreams.

Franklin, Ira and Harlon were among maybe a half dozen men under command of Mike Strank that came under a withering fire from a nest of Japanese snipers. They were pinned down behind a formation of large, jagged rocks, which offered protection on three sides. The only opening was to the sea where American destroyers were laying down a covering fire at the Japanese positions. "You know Holly, that's going to be one Hell of an experience," Mike dryly observed. Asked what he meant, Mike merely pointed in the direction of a fallen Marine a few yards to their front.

A moment later their world exploded. Franklin and Holly were bowled over by the blast but unhurt; a few others received serious head and chest wounds. Shocked and dazed, when the smoke cleared everyone's worst nightmares were realized. There on the ground lay Mike, a hole blown through his chest where his heart had been. Mike Strank, born on the same date as the Marine Corp's founding and on his third tour of duty – lay dead. If ever there was an American hero Mike was it. He had been on one knee drawing a plan in the sand when the shell tore right through him and exploded on the ground. Perhaps saddest of all was the fact that the shell that killed Mike Strank, was not fired by the Japanese. It almost certainly had to come from an offshore destroyer. As one soldier cradled Mike's crumpled form in his arms, another chokingly whispered in his ear, "Mike, you're the best damn Marine I ever knew." If there's any such thing as a silver lining hidden in this tragic footnote, it is this: Even in death Mike Strank had beaten the Japanese, for they never were able to kill him.



Mike Strank

Harlon Block was hit the hardest by Mike's death. He idolized Mike and losing him was like losing his big brother. It also put Harlon in command of the squad. They left Mike where he lay and went on with the war.

The 28th regiment was spread out over a front 1,000 yards wide in front of Nishi ridge with very little in the way of protective cover. It was while working across another barren exposed slope that Doc Bradley had his closest brush with death. He was holding a mortally wounded comrade in his arms trying to tend to his wounds when four Japanese soldiers suddenly made a Banzai charge out of a nearby cave entrance. They were right on top of Doc before he had the slightest chance to react, but luckily another Marine had stopped to help. "Watch out, Bradley!" he shouted while gunning two of the attackers down. The others retreated back to their hole but were quickly dealt with. When it was all over, ten Japanese bodies were pulled out of the cave. The dying soldier Doc tended to was Hank Hansen, one of the original flag-raisers.

As twilight settled on March 1st, the 28th had gained a mere 300 yards. It was the worst day in the regiment's history and still had one more tragic scene to play out. The squad now belonged to Harlon Block. As he moved among his men, ordering them to dig in and set up a good field of fire. He asked one of them, Tex Stanton, where another soldier was. "Over there," came the reply. "You'd better get down, Harlon..." Whoomp! The mortar round landed directly at Harlon's feet and he just exploded. The Texas All-State football player was ripped open from his groin to his

throat. For a moment he was immersed in a cloud of dust and smoke as a gathering redness raced across his tattered uniform. He cried out a gurgling, strangulated scream, "They killed me!", and desperately struggled to hold his shattered body together for a moment longer, then turned and collapsed on the ground, dying face-first in the sand. Harlon Block's profile, driving the pole into the ground while the others pushed the flag skyward and perhaps the most dynamic pose ever caught on film. . . now lay in a crumpled heap on Iwo's blood stained sand.

On this very same day, March 1, 1945, U.S. Congressman Joseph Hendricks of Florida rose from his seat in the House of Representatives and introduced a bill authorizing the construction of a monument. It would be a tribute "to the heroic action of the Marine Corps as typified by the Marines in this photograph. I have provided in the bill that this picture be a model for the monument because I do not believe any product of the mind of the artist could equal this photograph in action. Never have I seen a more striking photograph."

March 2-3, 1945 - The battle of Iwo Jima reaches its 11th day with a blowing, freezing rain that soaked the remnants of the 28th Regiment. American casualties stood at 16,000 while Japanese losses numbered somewhere around 6,000. The tragic loss of both Mike and Harlon on the same day devastated morale in Easy Company. Still, Ira, Franklin and Doc soldiered on.

Over craggy ridges and down rock filled ravines 4,500 men fought an enemy they could rarely see; every man wondering if his next moment would be his last. Some would think about their families and loved ones back home and how they would cope. Others just withdrew unto themselves; all were praying for a miracle that might get them out of this God-awful mess. Most believed their only ticket out would have a bullet attached to it. Ira's darker side one day manifested itself at Franklin's expense. During a brief lull in the fighting, he began to fashion a row of small, uniform mounds of earth with his hands. They looked very much like finished graves in a tiny cemetery. "Hey Franklin, this one here is yours," he said as the big Kentuckian walked by. Franklin kicked the mounds of dirt away and walked off.

Boots Thomas, Mike Strank's counterpart in 2nd platoon, which led the charge to the base of Mt. Suribachi on Day three, was shot through the head as he talked on a field telephone. Boots was right about one thing . . .he didn't live to see his 21st birthday. No one was immune from death's icy grip. The 2nd Battalion's Colonel, Chandler Johnson, who had saved the original flag from Suribachi for his men, was blown to bits by a shell-blast. "One second he was striding along in all his vigor; the next he was in pieces scattered all over the place," said Sergeant Richard Wheeler. His men cried without shame. Doc Bradley's luck continued to hold however, as he shot down bayonet-charging Japanese at near point-blank range while treating another wounded Marine. By the time the sun set, Nishi Ridge had finally fallen; America had laid another 519 of it's sons upon the altar of freedom, and five more Marines would earn the Congressional Medal of Honor, a record unmatched in modern warfare.

Only after the battle was over did the Marines discover that Nishi Ridge was as heavily fortified as Mt. Suribachi. Just over 200 feet high and stretching nearly to the western shoreline, it featured 100 camouflaged caves entrances and was manned by 1000 of Kuribayashi's best troops. Inside they found an elaborate tunnel network; one over 1,000 feet in length. This allowed the Japanese to shift troops to wherever they were needed most – all underground. They even had electricity and their own ventilation system.

On March 5, 2nd Battalion was pulled back for a couple days rest. Halfway around the world, the

latest edition of Time magazine hit the newsstands with the photograph on the cover along with the caption, "TO RANK WITH GETTYSBURG, VALLEY FORGE AND TARAWA".

Two days later, as Franklin and the shattered remnants of Easy Company headed back to the killing fields of northern Iwo Jima, Representative Mike Mansfield of Montana proposed on the House floor that the photograph be made the official symbol of the 7th War Bond Tour. Back then, the concept of deficit spending wasn't as popular as it is today. Bond Tours were held to raise money for the war effort. And the 7th was going to be the biggest and the best yet.

As the fighting dragged on through March 9th, each day became a mirror image of the one before: An early morning artillery barrage, a couple of strafing and bombing runs by Navy aircraft followed by the assault which always ran aground in the face of immediate, fierce opposition. The Japanese just didn't want to give up that island. The battle was now in its 18th day with no light yet at the end of the tunnel. Men were beginning to reach the end of their endurance. Many were in aid stations suffering from combat fatigue. One symptom, known as the 1,000- yard stare, can best be described as that look one has in their eyes when gazing upon their own ghost. At one such station, a young Marine no more than 18 stumbled in, shaking and sweating. He had no visible injuries but was simply overwhelmed with fear. Since they were too busy with other wounded, the doctors sent him back to his unit. Quietly sobbing now, the young Marine slumped down in front of a large boulder about 40 feet behind the aid station. He was still there a half-hour later, crying softly and trembling with fright when a mortar exploded at his feet and killed him.

Doc Bradley's luck finally ran out on March 11th. While huddled at the base of a cliff with some other Marines, a mortar exploded against a large, flat rock in front of them, blanketing the group of men in shards of hot steel. Though badly wounded in his right leg and foot, Bradley kept on tending to his wounded countrymen; dragging a soldier here back into a shell crater, working on another one there with a badly mangled leg, completely ignoring his own injuries. They finally evacuated him to a waiting hospital ship. The next day he was on a plane to Guam. John Bradley's war was over, and he had survived, but his recovery would take months.



John Bradley

On this very day, Wyoming Senator Joseph O'Mahoney rose from his seat and declared that a postage stamp should be issued honoring the photograph and the heroic flag-raisers.

Rene Gagnon, the last of the flag-raisers and least mentioned in this story, shot his weapon for the first time the day after John Bradley left. He was assigned as a runner for headquarters and had brought the replacement flag up Mt. Suribachi. His figure is barely visible behind that of John Bradley in the photograph.

Gagnon wandered into one of Iwo's countless caves with a buddy, assuming it was secure. They came face to face with a lone Japanese soldier and both Americans momentarily froze. That's all the time their enemy needed. He raised his gun and fired; Rene's buddy fell dead. Another second and it would be Rene's turn. He squeezed the trigger on his Garand rifle and the Japanese soldier crumpled to the floor. "Why did I have to do this?" he later recalled thinking. "Looking down a barrel into someone's

eyes and having to kill him. There's no glory in it."

March 14, 1945 - Admiral Chester Nimitz announces that Iwo Jima is conquered. The men on the island could only shake their heads. "We're still getting killed!" growled one Marine. Two days later a Chicago newspaper had the bright idea to bring those men in the photograph back home and make them the stars of the upcoming 7th War Bond tour. President Roosevelt liked the idea too, so the order was given to find these men and bring them home. By now, word of the photograph's stunning popularity had reached the island, and since Rene was the only identified flag-raiser, he got the task of naming the other five. He correctly identified everyone, save for Harlon Block, whom he mistook for another Marine who had died in Doc Bradley's arms two weeks earlier, Hank Hansen.

March 17, 1945 - The Marines were slowly but inexorably winning the battle of Iwo Jima. Disabled American bombers were already beginning to land here on their way back from bombing Japan. By war's end, 2,400 would make emergency landings on Iwo's tired and tattered runways, saving the lives of 27,000 crewmen and their planes. To the first American airman coming in over the battlefield, it was one of the most peculiar sights in military history. There, below them, were two huge armies locked in a mortal death-struggle, but only one was visible; the army fighting above ground. The other army was waging its war almost entirely beneath it. Admiral Nimitz reported that 24,127 Marines had been lost so far: 4,189 were killed in action, and 19,938 wounded, many grievously. Iwo Jima had now become the costliest battle in the Marine Corp's 168 years. He ended his report with this statement regarding the Marines, "Uncommon valor was a common virtue."



Ira Hayes

For Franklin and Ira, it had been a very hard time. They had been in combat for 20 out of the last 26 days and were the lone surviving Easy Company flag-raisers. They watched as their comrades, one by one, fell in battle. Their clothes were still stained with their blood as a cruel reminder. How much longer until they too, took a bullet or mortar shell? The fact that they had survived this long proved they were lucky. . .and pretty good soldiers. The battle fatigue had to be enormous. Part of Ira's strength may have been that he didn't really care if he lived or died. A deeply sullen man, who rarely smiled and had very few close friends, he seemed to be at war within himself, and his constant struggles with alcohol were the stuff of legend. Of course, when he drank, it got a lot worse. In a way, he may have welcomed death as an escape out of his emotional morass. It has been said that for a soldier to be truly effective, he has to consider himself already dead. This way, he isn't distracted by thoughts of loved ones and how much he will

miss them. He has seen his fate and accepted it. Now unburdened from this great weight, the soldier can finally operate as a fully functioning instrument of war. And there was no doubt Ira Hayes was a good combat soldier. Every Marine who ever fought with him said they were glad to have him alongside in a fight. Not one bad word – ever.

March 21, 1945 - The United States Marine Corps had been attacking the Imperial Army of Japan for 31 consecutive days; a feat without precedent in the annals of modern warfare. Men were pushed way beyond the limits of human endurance, both physically and psychologically. They were drunk with fatigue and the horrors of war, having gone deeper into the dark abyss of combat than any soldiers

before them. Their mental toughness, that sharp focus on survival, which had carried them throughout the battle, had by now entirely deserted them.

And that is when it happened to Franklin. He had been milling about with some other Marines during a short lull in the fighting. The Japanese were bottled up on the northern tip of the island near Kitano Point. Maybe, just maybe, he could survive this nightmare and go back home to Marian's loving arms. Back into his mother Goldie's warm and caring embrace; maybe spin some tall tales on the Liars Bench of the Hilltop General Store, just like the good old days... Life had seemed so much simpler then. And how he missed it.

The bullet hit him square in the back, shattering his spine. His buddies dove for cover as he swatted absently at his shirt, as if brushing away a fly; then collapsed. "How ya doin?" one shouted. "Not bad," Franklin replied, "I don't feel anything." And then he died.

Frank Sousley, who had survived thirty days of combat, who had transformed from happy-go-lucky farm boy to hardened combat veteran - lay dead. Who at age nineteen, quit his job at GM to go and fight for his country, was no more of this Earth. He never saw the photograph, never even knew of its existence. Now he belongs to the ages.

The war ended for Easy Company three days later. They were pulled back from the front line just two days before the Battle of Iwo Jima reached its bloody conclusion. Of the 310 men of Easy Company that hit the beach some thirty days ago, only fifty were left.

On Monday, April 9th, a telegram arrived in Hilltop, addressed to Goldie. Word of Franklin's death soon raced like a wildfire through the Kentucky countryside. Marian Hamm packed up all of Franklin's personal effects and walked them over to Goldie's house. Marian was still young and knew someday she would get over this tragic chapter in her life, but what about poor Goldie, what would she ever do? Her neighbors reported hearing Goldie's screams all through the night and into the next morning. Their home was a quarter-mile away.

The final numbers from Iwo Jima stagger the imagination. Out of Chandler Johnson's 2nd Battalion, which numbered 1,688 men at its peak, only 177 walked off the island; even their commander was dead. In 36 days of battle, 25,851 Marines fell in combat; 6,821 of which died and were buried in a makeshift cemetery at the base of Mt. Suribachi. Franklin was interred in Grave No. 2189, Mike Strank rested in Grave 694, while Harlon Block was buried in Grave 912. It took ten years to have all the bodies exhumed and brought home to America.

Japanese losses were 21,000 killed, most of which were entombed underground in the same caves in which they fought and died. Only 1,000 survived to be taken prisoner. The last two defenders did not surrender until 1949.

Iwo Jima was perhaps the most ferocious battle our nation ever fought. More medals for valor were awarded here than for any other battle in our nation's history. One third of the 84 Medals of Honor awarded the Marine Corps in all of World War II were earned on Iwo Jima.

John Bradley, Rene Gagnon and Ira Hayes were overnight national heroes, and thus became the centerpiece of the 7th War Bond Tour. Massive, cheering throngs greeted them wherever they went,

large city or small. Ironically, they didn't consider themselves heroes, and all were very public about it. The real heroes were those men who didn't return; all their buddies who were still back there. . . still on the island. They were just part of an accidental photograph. Near the end of the tour, Ira's drinking problem became so severe he was shipped back to his unit to keep him out of the public eye. The pressure was just more than he could take. He had told the Marine Corps of Rene's mistake identifying Hank Hansen as Harlon Block, but they told him to keep his mouth shut; it was too late to do anything now.

The Bond Tour wrapped up its wildly successful eight week trip around America in Washington D.C. on the 4th of July. The War Dept. had hoped to raise \$14 billion dollars. By tour's end they had over \$26 billion dollars.

One month and two days later, a lone B-29 bomber carrying the world's first atomic bomb, dipped its wings in salute as it flew over Iwo Jima on its way to Hiroshima. Japan would formally surrender within days and World War II would be over.

John Bradley married his hometown sweetheart and embarked on a successful career as a funeral director. His wife said he cried in his sleep for four years, tears running down his cheeks. Rene Gagnon also got married, but never did find the fame and fortune he so desperately desired. He had been promised all kinds of job opportunities during the Bond Tour, but after the war ended his celebrity status waned and the promised jobs turned out to be so much hot air. He ended up back on his prewar job working in a textile factory in New Hampshire.

Ira Hayes on the other hand, constantly found his name among the headlines, getting arrested over fifty times for drunk and disorderly conduct. In 1946 he hitchhiked to Texas and informed Harlon Block's father that his son, was indeed, the figure planting the flagpole in the famous photograph. A letter to their congressman soon followed, and in January, 1947, the Marine Corps admitted its mistake.

That same month, the military began bringing home the bodies of the Marines buried on Iwo. Mike Strank was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. Harlon Block's parents chose to have his remains brought back to Weslaco, Texas. Over 20,000 people turned out for his funeral procession. The caisson, which carried his body, was escorted by the surviving members of his undefeated high school football team; all of whom joined the Marines en masse after their high school graduation.

Franklin Runyon Sousley was buried in the Elizaville Cemetery on a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning, May 8, 1947. As the Marine escort gently lowered his body into its final resting place, local surviving veterans fired a salute as a lone bugler played taps.

To describe the ceremony as a somber occasion would be an understatement. Hardened veterans of the conflict had to draw on all their strength to choke back the tears while women and children cried



John Bradley, Ira Hayes, and Rene Gagnon outside the Oval Office, April 1945.

unashamedly. The governor of Kentucky stepped forward to hold Goldie's hand as she said her last good-byes to the son she loved so much.

On November 10, 1954 in Washington, D.C., the Marine Corps Monument honoring the six flag-raisers was unveiled amidst much pomp and ceremony. At 110 feet tall and weighing over 100 tons, it was the largest bronze statue in the world. Nearly 7,000 dignitaries were on hand. At the moment of the unveiling, everyone sat and gazed upon the statue in stunned reverence. Ira broke down and sobbed, burying his face in Goldie's lap. It would be the last time the three survivors would ever meet.

Ten weeks later, Ira Hayes was dead. He had been in a brawl over an all-night card game and was found facedown next to an old rusting car on his reservation. The coroner ruled it as a case of hypothermia, but everyone knew he had finally lost the biggest battle of his life; the battle with alcohol. Ira Hayes was 32 years old.



rene Gagnon

Rene Gagnon never did capitalize on his fame as a flag-raiser. He bounced around from job to job until he died of a heart attack in 1979 at age 54. He was a janitor.

Of the six men in the photograph, only John Bradley, the Navy medic, was able to find any semblance of happiness and contentment. He fathered eight children and remained married to the same woman until he passed away in 1994. Throughout the remainder of his life, John Bradley steadfastly refused to talk about Iwo Jima, the Photograph, even the war itself. The famous photograph never adorned his home's walls, the Navy Cross for Valor remained hidden in an upstairs closet until after his death. There were myriad reasons for this of course, all the horrors of combat he witnessed firsthand, the brutal torture-murder of his best friend at the hands of some Japanese hiding in a cave.

But perhaps most of all, John Bradley just didn't consider himself a hero. (Most heroes are like that) One day in 1964, his nine year old son, James, came home with his third grade history book showing the famous photograph of the flag-raising on Suribachi. "Look! There's your picture! My teacher says you're a hero and she wants you to speak to my class. Will you give a speech?" John didn't answer right away; when he did, he declined. All he told young James was this: "Son, I want you to remember something. The real heroes of Iwo Jima are the men who didn't come back."

What are we to do of this?

When I discovered the link between this enormous moment in history and Moraine Assembly, I was awestruck. Here we have one of our former co-workers, at the epicenter of one of our nation's defining moments. I knew we, as a workforce, would have to do something to honor this man and his sacrifices. The big question was what. And how. Franklin Sousley died at age nineteen. I can't even remember being nineteen. I now have children his age and have enjoyed the freedoms he fought and died for my whole life.

Think of the things he missed. The end of that horrific battle and of the war, the farm he never came

home to. He got killed in the war. He missed out on the Fifties and the birth of Rock & Roll. He never watched a Super Bowl or saw Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. Not to mention all the things we take for granted: air conditioning, television, an end to polio and a host of other diseases. And our family. . . Franklin never got to bounce his grandchildren on his knee, never experienced the joy of being a parent or the love of a truly good woman. He got killed in the war.

Both Franklin and his mother Goldie were big Reds fans. He never attended a single game, missed the three World Series championships that they would win. And he didn't live to see the disaster that unfolded on our TV sets on that fateful September morning last year.

And so now we find ourselves involved in another war. A war that is much more complicated than any we have ever fought in. In many ways, it doesn't really seem like we are in a war at all. We still go about our same daily routines like nothing ever happened, but something is different. 3,000 of us are gone, countless lives have been shattered by the loss of their loved ones.

Many men and women from this plant have followed in Franklin's footsteps to serve our nation in time of crisis. Many are serving now and they deserve our support and our prayers. Some of our members have children in the armed forces. We have seen their pictures and read their stories in this very paper. In fact, some of our co-workers have already lost family members in this war on terrorism.

I remember a day back in March at the plant. I was still reading the book about the flag-raisers and wondering what I could get the company to go along with to honor Franklin Sousley. Surely it must be worth a plaque in the lobby's display case, maybe next to our chrome-plated shovel. Perhaps we could rename Chevrolet Blvd after him or plant a tree out front in his name. I don't know. These gestures seem pale in comparison to the man and the events that they would honor.

And then a co-worker came around taking up a collection. It was for a guy who had just lost his brother in a helicopter crash in the Philippines. He had been sent there to help train the Philippine Army in its fight against al-Qaeda and was killed when his copter went down at sea. There were ten men on board; all died.

I asked how much money he had collected and was told they might get as much as \$300 dollars. 300 bucks. Is that all this man's life was worth? How far will 300 bucks put his three kids through college?

And that's when it hit me. Why don't we send his kids to college? Or better yet, let's put them all through school; every child whose parent is killed while in the service of their country in this war on terrorism. If Saddam Hussein can pay \$20,000 dollars to each family whose kid becomes a suicide terrorist bomber, surely we could offer a college education to those whose parent dies fighting these monsters.

There are roughly 4,200 of us working here. If 4,000 of us each pitched in the price of a can of pop (65 cents) each week, it would generate through the course of each year, over \$135,000 dollars. Just for the cost of one can of Coke. A dollar each week would generate \$200,000 dollars a year. Think of the good we could do with this money.

And we could call it, "The Franklin R. Sousley – Iwo Jima Memorial Foundation." Think of it. An employee funded charity dedicated solely to the men and women who fight our nation's battles. I can

think of no better way to honor the memory of our former co-worker and at the same time support the men and women of our armed forces than this scholarship program. We would be in effect, telling them that although we are not next to them in the trenches, we are doing something to truly support them. Should they lose their life in the service of our country, we will see to it that their children have the opportunity of a college education. All for the cost of a can of Coke.

This plant has the chance to do so much good. But we need everybody's help to pull it off. It was once written, "There is no single, greater power on Earth, than the power of a small group of people dedicated to a single, great idea.

President Bush, in a speech last spring, said this; "The best way to beat evil is by doing good. The character of the American people is our enduring strength. This nation needs men and women who respond to the call of duty, who stand up for the weak, who speak up for their beliefs, who sacrifice for a greater good."

While still in boot camp, Franklin told a buddy, Tex Stanton, " If I could win a medal, a Purple Heart or anything, .My mom would be so proud of me. She would pin it on her hat, and wear it to church." Franklin Sousey had no idea how famous he was to become. He never got to see himself in the most famous photograph of all time, never even knew of it's existence.

But now, with our help, he has a chance to reach back across the decades and help this great nation win the war on terrorism. Moraine Assembly, we have before us a golden opportunity to make a real difference in these kid's lives. Let's respond to the president's call to duty and show the world why America continues to be the last great hope for mankind and the greatest nation on Earth.

Randy Ingram
2002