The Iwo Jima Flag Raisers
Chaos, Controversy and World War II
U.S. Marine Corps Personnel Records

Bryan McGraw

The personnel named in the historic Rosenthal photo of the flag raising on Iwo Jima were recently corrected by the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC). From their official military personnel files (OMPFs) of the USMC, Bryan McGraw will provide an overview of the events associated with the flag raising, and what types of material can be found in a USMC OMPF of this period.
Bryan McGraw joined the National Archives in 2004 and was selected to his current position in 2012. Mr. McGraw is responsible for and oversees the day-to-day operations of five federal archives, in Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth, Kansas City, and St. Louis. Previously Mr. McGraw has served in various positions in civilian and military organizations, and received numerous awards and decorations throughout his career. Mr. McGraw’s education includes a B.S. degree from Southeast Missouri State University, M.P.A. from the University of Oklahoma, and a Ph.D. (all but the dissertation) in Public Policy from Saint Louis University. He is also a Senior Fellow and graduate of the Partnership for Public Service Excellence in Government Fellowship Program.
The Iwo Jima Flag Raisers: Chaos, Controversy & World War II U.S. Marine Corps Personnel Records

Bryan K. McGraw
Access Coordinator — St. Louis & Midwest
National Archives and Records Administration

Photograph of Flag Raising on Iwo Jima, 02/23/1945 (NWDNS-80-G-413988; National Archives Identifier: 520748); General Photographic File of the Department of Navy, 1943–1958; General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1804–1958; Record Group 80; National Archives.
Agenda

• Battle for Iwo Jima
• Flag Raising
  • Who Raised the Flag in the Famous Photo?
  • They Got It Wrong - Twice
  • Setting the Record Straight
• The Official Military Personnel Files of the Flag Raisers
• World War II Marine Corps OMPFs
• Why the Historical Record Matters
• Q & A
Battle for Iwo Jima

- “Operation Detachment” (invasion of Iwo Jima) lasted from February 19, 1945 to March 26, 1945
  - Goal was to capture island and its 3 airfields to protect US forces in the region & acquire a location to support air operations against mainland Japan
- Island only 4-2/3 miles long and 2-1/2 miles wide
- ~ 70,000 U.S. Marines from 3rd, 4th, 5th Marine Divisions and 147th Infantry Regiment along with units from 7th Air Force & Navy’s 5th Fleet opposed ~21,000 Dug in Japanese of the 109th Imperial Japanese Army
- Most intense fighting up to that point in the war
  - U.S. suffered nearly 7,000 Killed In Action (KIA) & over 19,000 wounded
  - Japanese lost all but 216 which were taken prisoner
Battle for Iwo Jima (continued)

• Map showing terrain, airstrips and known Japanese defenses prior to the invasion

• Mt. Suribachi is on the extreme southern end of the island

• The island was bombarded by air & naval forces for over 70 days prior to the invasion to “soften it up”

• Most Japanese forces were secure in caves and fortifications underground
National Archives Identifier: 32607059
Creator(s): Department of Defense. Department of the Navy. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. 9/18/1947- (Most Recent)

From: File Unit: U.S. Marine Corps Iwo Jima Operation, Volume 1, 1945 - 1945
Record Group 38: Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1875–2006

National Archives Identifier: 532542
Local Identifier: 127-N-110104
Creator(s): Department of Defense. Department of the Navy. U.S. Marine Corps. 9/18/1947- (Most Recent)


Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1775 - 1981
National Archives Identifier: 32607224  Container Identifier: 71  HMS Entry Number(s): UD-11W 42, UD-11W 41

National Archives Identifier: 32607314  Container Identifier: 71  HMS Entry Number(s): UD-11W 42, UD-11W 41
The Flag Raising

National Archives Identifier: 520748
Local Identifier: 1221

From: Series: General Photographic File of the Department of Navy, 1943–1958
Record Group 80: General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1804–1983
Flag Raising: Who Raised the Flag?

There were actually two separate flag raisings:

- 1020 hours on 23 February 1945 - a small 54” x 28” U.S. flag by members of the 3rd platoon, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division
  - 1Lt Harold Schrier, Sgt. Henry Hansen, Cpl. Charles Lindberg, PFCs Louis Charlo and James Michels
  - Photographed by Sgt. Louis Lowery, Leatherneck magazine
  - Battalion commander ordered a second flag raising as the first flag was too small

- Second and most famous flag raising occurred shortly thereafter by a different group of Marines from same unit, hoisting a 96” x 54” flag they had obtained from a Landing Ship, Tank (LST) anchored off-shore
  - Photo taken by AP Photographer Joseph Rosenthal
  - Went on to become most iconic photo in World War II & source for USMC Monument in Arlington
But...

• By 1947 controversy and questions began to emerge as to who was really in this iconic photo

• For decades the Pentagon, U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Government officials refuted any challenges to the true identify of the individuals in the photograph

• In 2013, amateur historian Eric Krelle, along with his friend Stephen Foley, began in-depth research into this photograph
  • Foley was recovering from surgery and read in-depth about Iwo Jima & scrutinized the photos
    • USN Corpsman John Bradley was clearly seen in first, less-famous photo but didn’t look like the individual in the second, most famous photograph
  • Led to publication in 2014 that Bradley was not in the photo
Flag Raising Controversy

- After widespread media coverage of the photo error claims, Commandant of the USMC established a review panel to determine - once and for all - who was in the photo.
- Findings showed, John Bradley, was in first flag raising photo but not in the second.
- USMC also investigated the first flag raising photo again and discovered additional errors:
  - PFC Louis Charlo & PFC James Michels were not among the men in the first flag raising.
  - Charlo was part of a reconnaissance team & Michels was part of a security detail for the first flag raising.
In a photo taken after the famous flag-raising, John Bradley, left, wears cuffed pants, with leggings and boots visible. Contrast those with the pants worn by the figure said to be Bradley in the famous Joe Rosenthal photo.
Joe Rosenthal's famous photo of the second flag raising on Mount Suribachi. On Feb. 23, 1945, in the middle of one of the fiercest battles of World War II, a group of U.S. Marines carried a flag up the highest peak on the Pacific island of Iwo Jima and planted it there. Since 1947, the Marine Corps has attached six names to the famous flag-raising photo taken that day. And it says the case is closed.


PFC Harold Schultz
Flag Raising Controversy

• USMC concluded on June 23, 2016 that, John Bradley, was in fact, NOT in the iconic photo taken by Joe Rosenthal
  • Determined that PFC Harold Schultz was in the photo in place of Bradley

• Second flag raising team was:
  • Cpl. Harlon Block, PFC Rene Gagnon, PFC Ira Hayes, PFC Harold Schultz, PFC Franklin Sousley & Sgt. Michael Strank

• We should take a look at some of these records and see what they tells us from both a historic & genealogical perspective
The Flag Raisers

Ira Hayes

Michael Strank

Rene Gagnon

Harold Schultz

Franklin Sousley

John Bradley

Harlon Block
Ira Hayes was a minor and required the consent of his parents to enlist in the Marine Corps.

- He enlisted in the Reserves of the USMC but was activated for the war.
Rene Gagnon
Enlistment Document

- He enlisted in the active duty USMC
- Reserve enlistments used a different form
Some OMPFs can contain vital record material such as a Marriage License

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**Marriage License - Rene Gagnon**

I Hereby Certify, That on this 7th day of July Nineteen hundred and forty five the below, were by me united in marriage at the Cathedral in accordance with the License issued by the Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas herein indicated.

APPLICATION 1695

RENE ARTHUR GAGNON and PAULINE GEORGETTE HARNOIS

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</table>

Name of Person consenting if Groom is a Minor

Name of Person consenting if Bride is a Minor

This Certificate to be given to the Contracting Parties.

[Signature]

Vice-Chancellor, Archdeacon of Bald

Address

Baltimore -1, Md.
Service Record Book

Professional & Conduct Record Extract from Service Record Book - Harlon Block

- Shows his assignment history from beginning to his death & burial on Iwo Jima
Navy Cross Citation for John Bradley

For his heroism in treating wounded Marines 2 days prior to the flag raising.
Prior to the establishment of the Defense Department in 1947 & creation of the DD Form 214, each military service department had their own unique Report of Separation form.
Unfortunately 3 of the 6 Flag Raisers were killed in action a short time after the flag raising during the Battle for Iwo Jima:

Harlon Block: March 1, 1945
Michael Strank: March 1, 1945
Franklin Sousley: March 21, 1945
USMC Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs)

- **Citation**: Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives at St. Louis
- **National Archives Identifier**: 299715
- **Date Range**: Enlisted & Officer dates range from 1905 to the current archival date (a rolling date: today’s date 62 years ago)
- **Creating Agency & Provenance**: War Department (later Department of Defense), Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps.
- **Function & Use**: During service, the Marine Corps used the OMPF to record the member’s assignments, training, advancement, separation and other matters pertinent to the member’s military career
USMC OMPFs (continued)

- **Scope & Content:**
  - Military service dates
  - Training & certifications
  - Character of discharge
  - Entrance & separation medical information/physicals
  - Promotions
  - Performance & fitness reports
  - Awards & decorations
  - Non-judicial punishment (as appropriate)
  - Enlistment contracts & commissioning documents
  - Variety of personal information: date & place of birth, next of kin (NOK), religious preference, financial information
  - Photographs (less common)

- **Arrangement:** Filed sequentially by serial number (enlisted), by serial suffix, then serial number prefix (officers), and for newer, not yet archived OMPFs, by sequential Registry number
USMC OMPF (continued)

- Locating a record—please provide as much of this information as possible:
  - Complete name used while in the service
  - Service number
  - Social Security number
  - Branch of Service
  - Dates of Service
  - Date and place of birth
  - If officer or enlisted (if known)
  - If female, include maiden and married names

- Send written requests to:
  National Personnel Records Center, 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138

- Contact the public research room if you are interested in accessing on-site at 314-801-0850

- For more information [www.archives.gov/st-louis](http://www.archives.gov/st-louis)
USMC OMPFs

• The USMC OMPFs are full of essential information on the specific veteran
• They average over 75 pages each—some more, based on actions, length of service & other factors
• These records tell the story of these Marines from the time they entered until their separation or death
• They are an excellent source of genealogical and historical material for a variety of researchers
Why it Matters

• The historical record is THE record for the description of events and the lessons learned for future generations
  • If you don’t understand history you are doomed to repeat it

• We need to get it right!

• As citizens, taxpayers, researchers, historians, etc., it is our responsibility to set the record straight—the outcomes do matter and the future is often based on our collective past experiences

Thank you! I will now entertain any questions in the time remaining


• Ibid. (November 23, 2014). New mystery arises from iconic Iwo Jima image. The Omaha World-Herald. Omaha, NE.


• Official Military Personnel File of Harlon Block; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.

• Official Military Personnel File of John Bradley; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 24, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.

• Official Military Personnel File of Rene Gagnon; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.

• Official Military Personnel File of Ira Hayes; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.
References (continued)

- Official Military Personnel File of Harold Schultz; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.

- Official Military Personnel File of Franklin Sousley; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.

- Official Military Personnel File of Michael Strank; Official Military Personnel Files, Record Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps; National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives at St. Louis.


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Presenter didn’t get to your question?

You may email us at inquire@nara.gov