

Remembering the Battle of Iwo Jima

When Joe Rosenthal snapped the iconic photograph, Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima, he knew it was a special sight, but probably never imagined the lengths the snapshot would travel in history. It was his capturing of the Battle of Iwo Jima, during the Second World War that became one of the most well known depictions of the war. From this image, a host of stories, life histories, movies, and books have emerged, namely the most recent Clint Eastwood film by the name of "Flags of Our Fathers."

It was a Friday, February 23rd, 1945, approaching 1:00pm. The Marines had only landed at Iwo Jima four days earlier and Rosenthal, a photographer with the Associated Press, was visiting the island on one of his daily checkups. The news of a flag raising ceremony atop a volcano named Mount Suribachi came to his attention and upon his arrival, he immediately raced to the southern tip of the island with his trusty camera in hand. Rosenthal was too late to capture the first raised flag, but as he reached the summit, he noticed a different group of Marines readying to raise a second.

Attached to a stretch of pipe, a large American flag was geared for flight into the air in one of the most triumphant events throughout war history. Rosenthal was able to position his short stature on a pile of rocks and click his camera at just the right moment to produce the famous photo you see of six war heroes raising Old Glory: John Bradley, Harlon Block, Michael Strank, Ira Hayes, Franklin Sousley, and Rene Gagnon.

The flag raising on Mount Suribachi was important in the strides towards success because through intense fighting, the Marines were able to capture the highest point of the island within the first week of combat. Sadly, three of the original flag raisers did not live to see the final triumph.

Once the photograph hit the American public, Rosenthal was heralded as the responsible party for bringing home such a moving symbol of victory. The photo was passed across the world, even gracing the February 25th Sunday newspapers. Numerous magazines displayed the photo on their covers, and in later years, the United States Marine Corps War Memorial was fashioned from the influential image. A stamp was also created in its likeness.

Remembering the Battle of Iwo Jima through the well-known photo prompted a series of film adaptations of the events and lives of those involved. In the Clint Eastwood-directed "Flags of Our Fathers," the life stories of the six men who raised the flag unfold. Rosenthal's presence and involvement is also mentioned.

Before the Eastwood's Hollywood blockbuster was created, the United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard produced a 1945 documentary titled, "To the Shores of Iwo Jima." In 1949, John Wayne starred in the "Sands of Iwo Jima," where Tony Curtis took on the role of flag raiser, Ira Hayes in the 1961 film, "The Outsider." As for Rosenthal, he won a Pulitzer Prize for the infamous snapshot, where its impact continues to mesmerize throughout the years.

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About the Author

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