



Flags of Our Fathers

By James Bradley, Ron Powers

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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE IMMORTAL PHOTOGRAPH THAT HAS COME TO SYMBOLIZE THE COURAGE AND INDOMITABLE WILL OF AMERICA

In February 1945, American Marines plunged into the surf at Iwo Jima—and into history. Through a hail of machine-gun and mortar fire that left the beaches strewn with comrades, they battled to the island's highest peak. And after climbing through a landscape of hell itself, they raised a flag.

Now the son of one of the flagraisers has written a powerful account of six very different young men who came together in a moment that will live forever.

To his family, John Bradley never spoke of the photograph or the war. But after his death at age seventy, his family discovered closed boxes of letters and photos. In *Flags of Our Fathers*, James Bradley draws on those documents to retrace the lives of his father and the men of Easy Company. Following these men's paths to Iwo Jima, James Bradley has written a classic story of the heroic battle for the Pacific's most crucial island—an island riddled with Japanese tunnels and 22,000 fanatic defenders who would fight to the last man.

But perhaps the most interesting part of the story is what happened after the victory. The men in the photo—three were killed during the battle—were proclaimed heroes and flown home, to become reluctant symbols. For two of them, the adulation was shattering. Only James Bradley's father truly survived, displaying no copy of the famous photograph in his home, telling his son only: "The real heroes of Iwo Jima were the guys who didn't come back."

Few books ever have captured the complexity and furor of war and its aftermath as well as *Flags of Our Fathers*. A penetrating, epic look at a generation at war, this is history told with keen insight, enormous honesty, and the passion of a son paying homage to his father. It is the story of the difference between truth and myth, the meaning of being a hero, and the essence of the human experience of war.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The Battle of Iwo Jima, fought in the winter of 1945 on a rocky island south of Japan, brought a ferocious slice of hell to earth: in a month's time, more than 22,000 Japanese soldiers would die defending a patch of ground a third the size of Manhattan, while nearly 26,000 Americans fell taking it from them. The battle was a turning point in the war in the Pacific, and it produced one of World War II's enduring images: a photograph of six soldiers raising an American flag on the flank of Mount Suribachi, the island's commanding high point.

One of those young Americans was John Bradley, a Navy corpsman who a few days before had braved enemy mortar and machine-gun fire to administer first aid to a wounded Marine and then drag him to safety. For this act of heroism Bradley would receive the Navy Cross, an award second only to the Medal of Honor.

Bradley, who died in 1994, never mentioned his feat to his family. Only after his death did Bradley's son James begin to piece together the facts of his father's heroism, which was but one of countless acts of sacrifice made by the young men who fought at Iwo Jima. *Flags of Our Fathers* recounts the sometimes tragic life stories of the six men who raised the flag that February day--one an Arizona Indian who would die following an alcohol-soaked brawl, another a Kentucky hillbilly, still another a Pennsylvania steel-mill worker--and who became reluctant heroes in the bargain. A strongly felt and well-written entry in a spate of recent books on World War II, *Flags* gives a you-are-there depiction of that conflict's horrible arenas--and a moving homage to the men whom fate brought there. --Gregory McNamee

From Publishers Weekly

Say "Iwo Jima," and what comes to mind? Most likely a famous photograph from 1945: six tired, helmeted Marines, fresh from a long, terrifying and bloody battle, work together to raise the American flag on Mount Suribachi. Bradley's father, John, was one of the six. In this voluminous and memorable work of popular history mixed with memoir, Bradley and Powers (White Town Drowsing) reconstruct those Marines' experiences, and those of their Pacific Theater comrades. The authors begin with the six soldiers' childhoods. Soon enough, bombs have fallen on Pearl Harbor, and by May '43 the young men have become proud leathernecks. Bradley and Powers incorporate accounts of specific battles, like "Hellzapoppin Ridge" (Bougainville, December '43), and pull in corps life and lore, from the tough-minded to the slightly silly, from mandatory penis inspections (medics checking for VD) to life in the pitch-dark of "Tent City No. 1." And they cover the strategy and tactics leading up to the awful battle for the island. The navy's disputed plans for offshore bombardment, cut at the last minute from 10 days to three; the 16 miles of Japanese underground tunnels, far more than Allied intelligence expected. A quarter of the book follows the fighting on Iwo Jima, sortie by sortie. The final chapters pursue the veterans' subsequent lives: Bradley and Powers set themselves against often-sanctimonious tradition, retrieving the stories of six more or less troubled individuals from the anonymity of heroic myth. A simple thesis emerges from all the detail worked into this touching group portrait, in a comment by John Bradley: "The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back." No reader will forget the lesson. (May)

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From Library Journal

This story stars the six soldiers who raised Old Glory over Mt. Suribachi during the bloody battle for Iwo Jima in World War II. Joe Rosenthal's powerful photo of their shouldering the flag became the symbol of U.S. triumph over the Japanese. The three surviving flag raisers, including Bradley's father, John, toured as

wartime heroes, selling billions in bonds. But John Bradley, who had been badly wounded, insisted he was not a hero; only the men "who did not come back" were heroes. His son re-creates the backgrounds of the events as seen by his protagonists, such as amphibious assaults on fiercely defended islands; horrifying deaths and injuries to the troops; and grotesque episodes, like the torture and murder of a U.S. prisoner. These fragments of the Pacific war dramatize what the six achieved in spite of obstacles and frustrations; one, a Native American, succumbed to depression and alcohol, dying ten years after the war. Actor Barry Bostwick's resonant voice enunciates well, except for slighting an "r" in "February," a key month on Suribachi. Recommended for those who like tales of youths who fought and died for their country. AGordon Blackwell, Eastchester, NY
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joel Fallis:

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