

**ENCLOSURE**

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Omaha World-Herald (<http://omaha.com>)

# New mystery arises from iconic Iwo Jima image

*History buffs' analysis of the famous World War II  
photo challenges a long-assumed truth*

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WORLD-HERALD COLUMNIST

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2014

**E**ric stands at the front of a classroom and points at the blown-up image of a famous photo. • He's pointing because he believes the photo has long concealed a lie. He's pointing because he believes the same photo can also be used to reveal something else. • "Have we ever looked at this photo?" he asks the handful of people who have gathered to view his research, including a Creighton University expert on American history and a military historian. "Have we really looked at it?"

You have seen this photo, perhaps seen it depicted on stamps you licked or on the covers of magazines you read or on a 60-foot-tall bronze statue you looked up at before entering Arlington National Cemetery.

You have seen this photo because 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. As six men struggled to plant the flagpole into the ground, an Associated Press photographer, who was worried he would miss the shot, clicked his shutter without even looking through his viewfinder. You have seen this photo because it's one of the most famous photos in American history.

Eric has stared at this photo for hours. He has zoomed in on the black-and-white image until he can see the creases in the men's helmet covers and can study the unique shapes of their noses. He has combed through dozens of other photos taken that day atop Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi. He has watched a film clip of the famous flag raising so many times he has each frame memorized.

Eric is an amateur history buff, a World War II enthusiast, a 39-year-old son of the Marines that he maintains a website celebrating the history of the Marines Corps' famed 5th Division.

He has stared at the photo for the better part of a year, and he's convinced that he and another amateur history buff have discovered something that has apparently eluded military leaders, World War II experts and historians for nearly seven decades.

Since 1947, the identities of the half-dozen young men raising this flag have been undisputed, six names known to the Marine Corps and to military historians in the same way the rest of us know that the flag they are raising is red, white and blue.

But disputing the undisputed is exactly what Eric is doing. After months of research, he is standing in this classroom and arguing that a famous medic, long identified as the Navy corpsman standing smack in the middle of the famous photo, is in fact not in the photo at all.

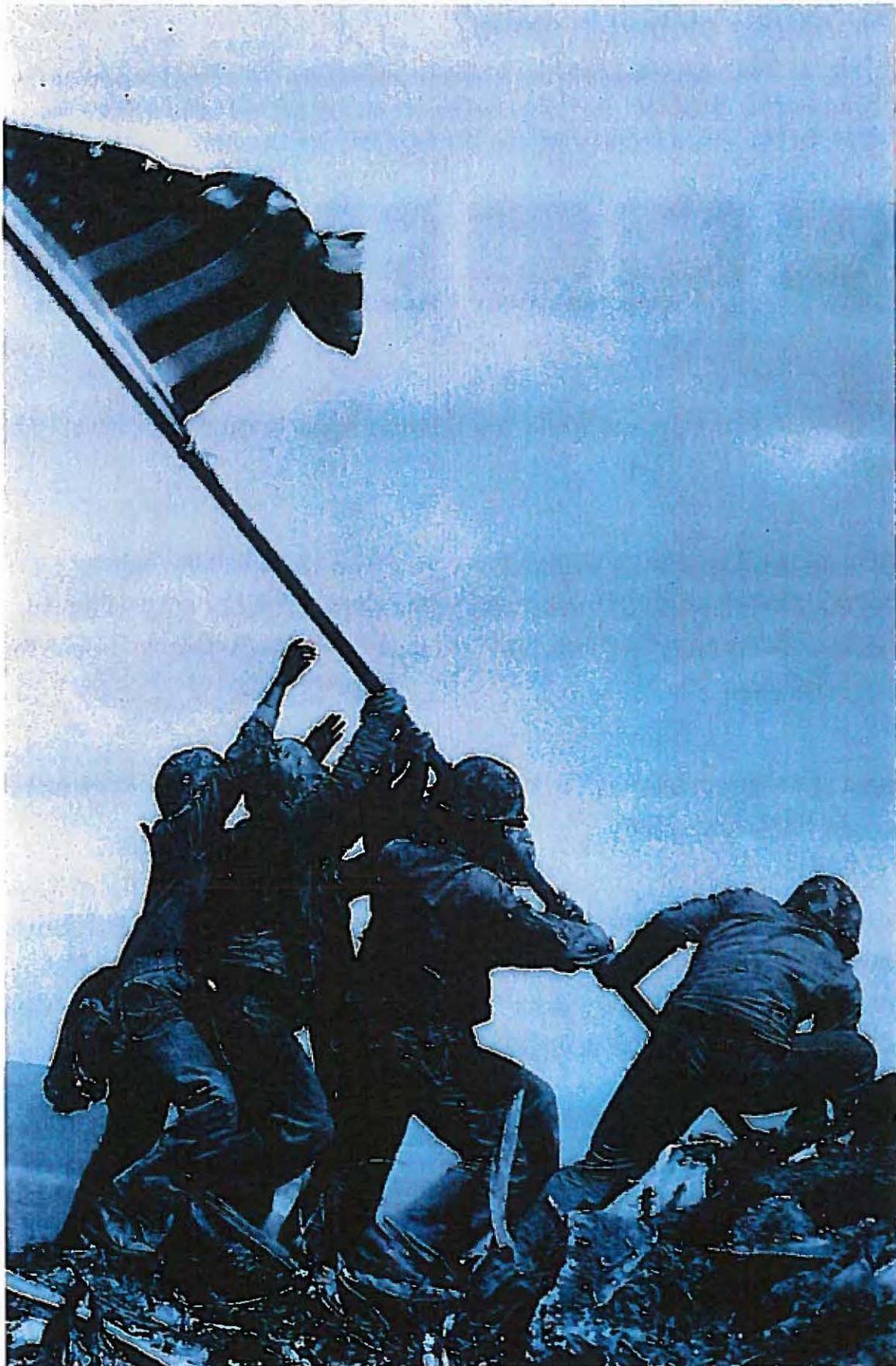
He is arguing that another man — a Marine who isn't even a blip on the radar of history — is in fact standing front and center in the most iconic image of World War II.

And Eric Krelle and his friend Stephen Foley appear to be doing something even larger: In 2014, armed with technology that places libraries of information at our fingertips, two rank amateurs are trying to prove they can take an official pronouncement from the highest level of American officialdom and insert a giant, blinking question mark behind it.

For seven decades, we have believed what the Pentagon, Congress, historians and Hollywood told us to believe about the famous "Flags of Our Fathers" photo, Eric says.

Now we should believe our own eyes instead.

"People can hold onto what they have always known in the past," Eric tells me the first time we meet. "But to me, the photos are the truth."



## Six names etched in stone?

On Feb. 23, 1945, war photographer Joe Rosenthal snapped one of the most iconic images in American history. Since 1947, the military has said the six men pictured below were the flag raisers. But new evidence raises a question: Are these the correct six men?



Ira Hayes



Franklin Sousley



Michael Strank



John Bradley



Rene Gagnon



Harlon Block

The quixotic effort to rewrite World War II history began because an Irishman had a hernia.

Late in the summer of 2013, Stephen Foley, who works for a building supply company in Wexford, Ireland, underwent hernia surgery. After he left the hospital, he took up residence on his couch, unable to work or even walk down to the pub for a pint of Guinness.

Instead of watching soccer on TV, Foley started re-reading every book ever written about the Battle of Iwo Jima.

As a teenager, he had become fascinated by World War II. He found himself drawn to stories about the Battle for the Pacific, and drawn more specifically to the U.S. Marines who fought so fiercely and so famously against the Japanese, and even more specifically to a single photo that seemed to capture all the sacrifice and struggle in a single snapshot.

"I don't know why," he says of the Iwo Jima photo. "It just always struck a chord with me."

Which is how Foley came to be reading a book about Iwo Jima and the flag raising. The cover art was the famous flag-raising photo taken by AP photographer Joe Rosenthal. But the book also contained lesser-known photos that Rosenthal and other photographers had taken that day, right before and after Rosenthal snapped the famous photo.

In these photos, which Foley had never seen before, Navy corpsman John Bradley's well-known face is clearly visible.

Foley looked at those photos. He looked at the famous photo, where Bradley is said to be the figure second from right. This man's face is largely obscured as he yanks the flag into place.

He looked at Bradley again. He looked at the famous photo again.

Strange, the Irishman thought. That doesn't look like the same man.

He could have stopped there, probably would have stopped had he not been stuck on his couch.

But he was anchored for weeks, and so the Irishman recovering from hernia surgery grabbed his computer and began to pull up dozens of other photos taken atop Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945 — photos that in recent years have become publicly available on the Internet.

There were actually two flags raised that day on Mount Suribachi. A first flag went up in the morning, before a serious firefight with Japanese soldiers who were hiding in nearby caves. There are photos of that first flag raising, but none ever became famous.

The Americans raised a second flag several hours later, reportedly because they had been ordered to put up a bigger flag by commanding officers. This second flag raising, which happened during a lull in the fighting, became the subject of Rosenthal's famous photo.

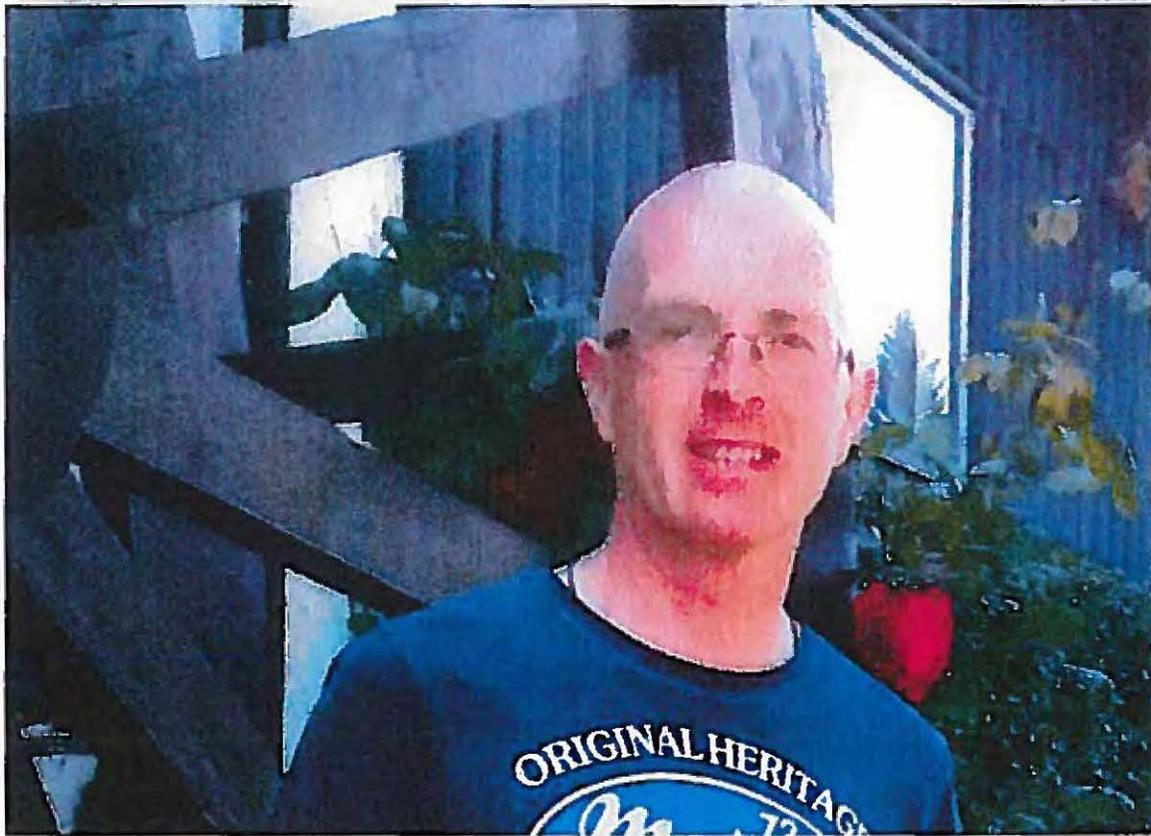
The Irishman sat on his couch and zoomed in on the figure said to be Bradley in the famous photo. And he began to compare everything about that figure with known photos of Bradley taken in the hours before and after the famous photo was snapped.

He did this for an afternoon. And then for two days. And then for two weeks. And as he healed from hernia surgery, he began to catalog a list of ways that every other known photo of John Bradley taken that day differs from the figure in the famous photo.



**Eric Krelle**

The Omaha history buff turned to his large collection of World War II-era Marine Corps memorabilia as he tried to identify one of the men in the photo.

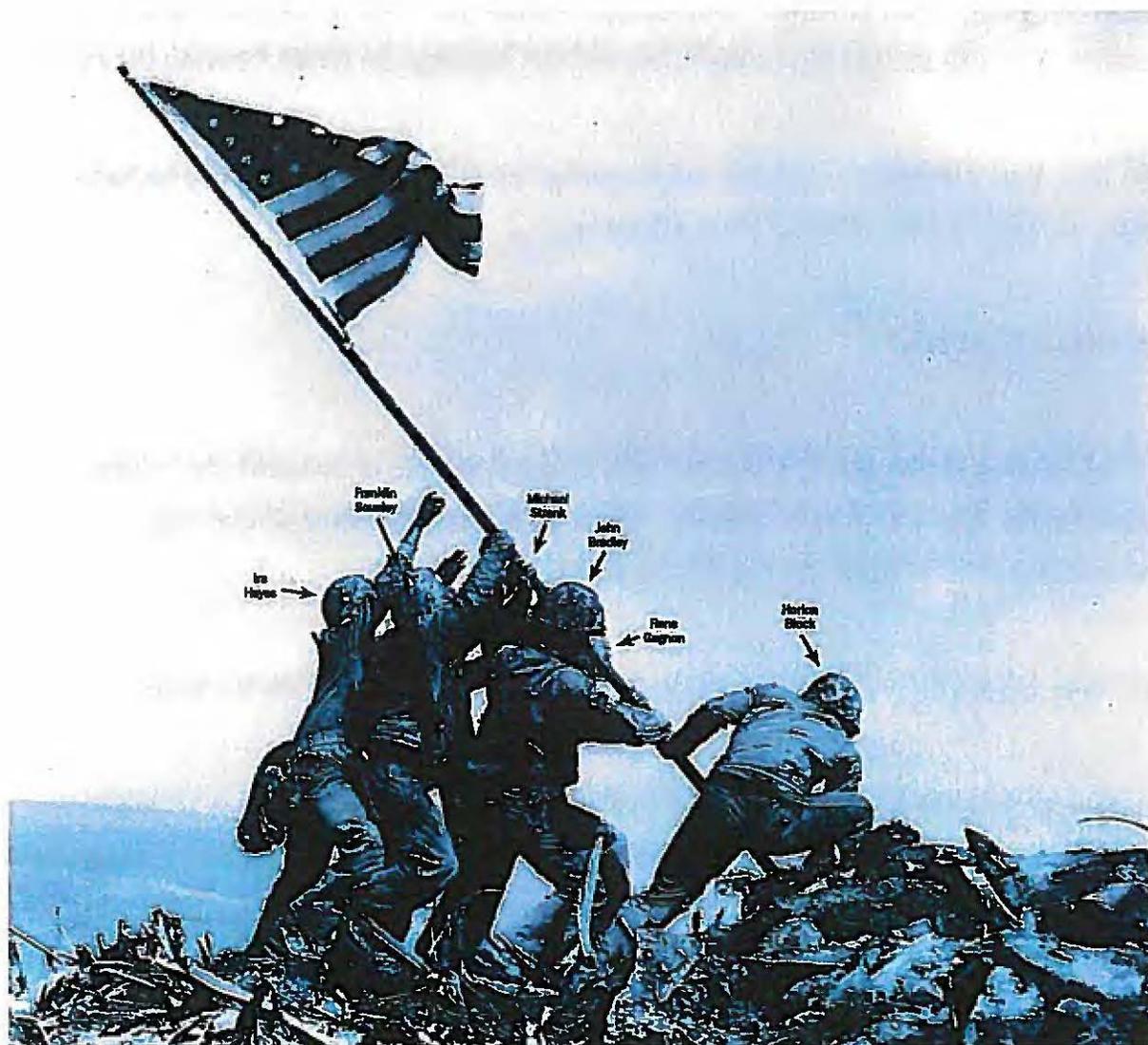
**Stephen Foley**

The Irishman had always been drawn to the famous flag-raising photo. But a close look last year at other photos from that day atop Mount Suribachi convinced him that Navy corpsman John Bradley was not one of the six men pictured raising the flag the second time.



**Joe Rosenthal**

The Associated Press war photographer who took the flag-raising photo didn't stop snapping photos long enough to write down the names of the six men, and the military and the media struggled to identify them.



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.

Let's start with the pants.

In the famous photo, the figure said to be Bradley wears uncuffed pants. They hang down over the top of his boots.

In every other photo in which John Bradley's pants are visible, they are tightly cuffed. You can see the top of his boots and the leggings he wears beneath his pants.

So fine, Foley thought — maybe the corpsman uncuffed his pants before he helped raise the flag and then cuffed them afterward.

But then what about his headgear?

In the famous photo, the bill of a soft utility cap is visible underneath the helmet worn by the figure said to be Bradley. Some men wore this short-billed cap underneath their helmets during World War II. Some didn't.

In every other photo of Bradley, no such soft cap is visible beneath his helmet.

In fact, in Rosenthal's famous "Gung Ho" photo — showing a group of 18 Marines and Navy corpsmen gathered around the flag — Bradley is pictured raising his helmet to the sky, making the inside of the helmet visible. There is no soft cap stuck in his helmet, and no soft cap stuck on his head.

Fine, Foley thought — maybe he dropped it on the ground.

But then what about his belt?

Foley zoomed in on the belt worn by the figure said to be Bradley in the famous

photo.

The belt appears to have the flaps of a standard Marine cartridge belt. Ammo pouches are visible, pouches meant to hold ammo for the Marine standard-issue M-1 rifle. And even more visible is a pair of wire cutters hanging off the belt.

Foley was stunned by this close-up, stunned because he knew that Bradley was a Navy corpsman, not a Marine infantryman.

A corpsman's uniform would include a pistol belt, not a cartridge belt. He would be carrying a sidearm, not an M-1 rifle. And he would have no need to hang wire cutters off his belt, like a Marine grunt would.

And sure enough, when Foley found other photos of Bradley that showed his belt that day, he appears to be wearing a pistol belt. No ammo pouches or wire cutters are visible on his belt in any other photos.

Different pants. Different headgear. Different belt. For the Irishman, this was one coincidence too many.

The belt stunned him for another reason. Bradley's son, James Bradley, has done more than any other American to publicize the story of the famous flag raising.

James Bradley's book "Flags of Our Fathers" follows the stories of John Bradley, Rene Gagnon and Ira Hayes as they were quickly identified as flag raisers and were ordered back to the United States by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. (The other three men identified as flag raisers — Harlon Block, Michael Strank and Franklin Sousley — had been killed during the Battle of Iwo Jima by the time the flag-raising photo reached the United States.)

The remaining trio went on a war bond drive, touring the country as national heroes

even as they each grappled with what they had seen and done on Iwo Jima.

"Flags of Our Fathers" zoomed to No. 1 on the New York Times best-seller list when released in 2000, and then it became a Steven Spielberg-produced and Clint Eastwood-directed hit movie in 2006.

So the Irishman understood that by pulling Navy corpsman John Bradley out of the photo, he was doing more than just re-captioning that photo. Like it or not, he was trying to change a foundational fact on which an important American story is built.

"The image has endured," he said. "It's still relevant today. And so it kind of boggles my mind: Am I the first person to notice this? I can't be the first person, can I?"

#### **Clue No. 1: Bradley's bag and cuffed pants**



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.



Bradley is third from the left in this photo.

### Clue No. 2: Bradley's helmet

Here is the famed "Gung Ho" shot, taken after the second flag was raised. Bradley, sixth from left, has no soft cap stuck in his helmet or on his head. This seems to contrast with the figure said to be Bradley in the famous photo, who appears to be wearing a short-billed soft utility cap inside his helmet.



**Clue No. 3: Bradley's belt**



Bradley, seen from the back, after the first flag-raising, hours before Rosenthal's famous photo of the second flag-raising. Bradley appears to be wearing a belt and gear different from that worn by the man who is said to be Bradley in the famous flag-raising shot. Also note Bradley's tightly cuffed trousers, with leggings visible underneath.

James Bradley is trying to keep an open mind. He is. But the best-selling author and son of John Bradley has just finished the rough draft of another book, he's headed to Vietnam in a couple of days and he says he doesn't have the time or energy to wade into a debate about the identity of the iconic flag raisers.

"So, you are telling me that there are all these witnesses, these survivors who come home (from Mount Suribachi), and nobody says anything, and then someone figures out it's different 70 years later, when they are all gone?" he says. "I mean, come on."

Bradley was emailed the contents of the research detailed in this story in early November. In subsequent phone calls and emails, he asked for more information, suggested different experts who could be helpful and discussed his own process in researching and co-writing "Flags of Our Fathers."

He also pointed out two reasons that the research on the Iwo Jima photos might be flawed: First, the time lapse between photos may have allowed his father to uncuff his pants or change other aspects of his uniform, and second, he believes that if his father, John Bradley, weren't in the photo, he would have spoken up at some point before his death in 1994.

"He didn't want to be in the hoopla, ever," Bradley says.

One thing James Bradley said he didn't do was look at the research that had been emailed to him. After initially agreeing to look at the dozens of photos sent to him, he said Wednesday that he had chosen not to do so.

"Listen, I wrote a book based on facts told to me by guys who had actually been there. That's my research. That's what I trust," he said.

"At the end of the day, the truth is the truth," he said. "Everything is possible. But really?"



**James Bradley**

The "Flags of Our Fathers" co-author said he believes that if his father, John Bradley, weren't in the photo, he would have spoken up at some point before his death in 1994. (Photo: AP)

From the moment Joe Rosenthal snapped the photo that made the flag raising famous, the military and the media struggled to identify the six men pictured. It's easy to see why: Even the Marine who carried the flag up the mountain and then helped raise it had a hard time correctly identifying the men standing to his left and right.

When the photo was first published in late February 1945, it ran without a caption. Rosenthal, not realizing he had just captured an iconic image, didn't stop snapping photos long enough to write down the names of the six men.

Subsequent captions and stories that accompanied the photo were rife with errors.

Some newspapers confused the second flag raising, the one captured by Rosenthal, with the first flag raising several hours earlier. Others identified a variety of men as "flag raisers" who never even climbed Mount Suribachi.

Time Magazine accused Rosenthal of staging the photo in order to get the perfect image. Yet that accusation, which has been repeated ad nauseam, is proved false by the dozens of other photos and film clips shot by four different cameramen that day.

In March 1945, President Roosevelt, wishing to clear up the confusion, ordered the Marine Corps to identify the flag raisers and return the survivors to the United States. That order came with an ulterior motive: Roosevelt wanted the flag raisers to help sell war bonds to fund the costly war effort.

Pfc. Rene Gagnon, a runner for the 5th Division's E Company, had carried the flag up Mount Suribachi and was known to have appeared in Rosenthal's photo. So Marine higher-ups went to him and asked a seemingly simple question: Who are the men who helped you raise that flag?

Gagnon gave them four names: John Bradley, who had been wounded shortly after the photo. And Franklin Sousley, Michael Strank and Henry "Hank" Hansen, who had all died in the fighting that raged on Iwo Jima days after Rosenthal snapped his photo.

Gagnon intentionally didn't name Pfc. Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona.

Hayes was in the photo but had already told Gagnon that he had no interest in being famous or going on a war bonds drive. In fact, Hayes had threatened Gagnon "with bodily harm" if he identified him as a flag raiser, according to statements given later by Marine Corps officials and Hayes himself.

But Gagnon seemingly made another error, this one an accident. He incorrectly identified the Marine standing at the base of the flagpole.

That's Hank Hansen, he told the Marine Corps.

Both Gagnon and John Bradley signed affidavits swearing that Hansen was pictured at the base of the flagpole. Hansen's mother joined the war bond tour for months.

But in 1946, the family of a Marine named Harlon Block, who had also died on Iwo Jima, sent a letter to their congressman containing a bombshell: a note from Ira Hayes stating that Block — not Hansen — was in the famous photo.

Within a year, the Marine Corps opened a special investigation to look into the Hansen-Block dispute. Bradley and eventually Gagnon signed new affidavits, and in January 1947, the investigation board issued its verdict. The sixth flag raiser was Harlon Block.

Hansen's family, furious, demanded the release of evidence compiled during the investigation. The Marine Corps refused.

Since then, the Marine Corps has attached six names to the famous flag raising photo: Gagnon. Bradley. Hayes. Sousley. Strank. Block.

The case, they say, is closed.

"For nearly 70 years the Marine Corps firmly stands by the final conclusions of (the) investigation and has no cause to question the identity of the six flag raisers of the second flag raising," an official from the Marine Corps History Division emailed me.

At least one Marine never seemed entirely convinced.

Gagnon was asked by reporters in January 1947 to explain the Hansen-Block discrepancy. He had signed two conflicting affidavits. Was he sure the sixth flag raiser was Harlon Block?

"Nobody will ever know for sure," he said.

Back in Ireland, a history buff recovering from hernia surgery had a new problem.

If that isn't Bradley in the famous photo, then who is standing in his spot?

Foley studied dozens more photos taken on Iwo Jima that day, and his eyes kept coming back to the same man. This Marine is wearing uncuffed pants. He is wearing a soft cap underneath his helmet. He is wearing a cartridge belt. He has wire cutters hanging off that belt in the same place as the figure in the famous photo.

And this Marine simply looked like the figure standing second from right in the famous photo, Foley thought.

Foley believes the man long identified as Bradley is actually Pfc. Franklin Sousley.

But here's the rub: All this time, Sousley was believed to be the man third from the right, directly to the left of Bradley.

Foley didn't know what to do with this information. He was acutely aware that he has no particular credentials that make him an expert in the areas of the famous photo, Iwo Jima or history in general. He is, after all, an employee of a building supply company in Ireland.

Foley tried to email several historians and authors he respects, people who do have credentials. He didn't get a response.

So then Stephen Foley emailed Eric Krelle, the Omahan who runs the 5th Marine Division website, a website Foley sometimes reads.

In Omaha, Eric Krelle got this email from Ireland. He was intrigued. He started his own investigation.

He, too, looked at dozens of blown-up photos and compared belts and cuffed pants.

And he came to his own conclusion.

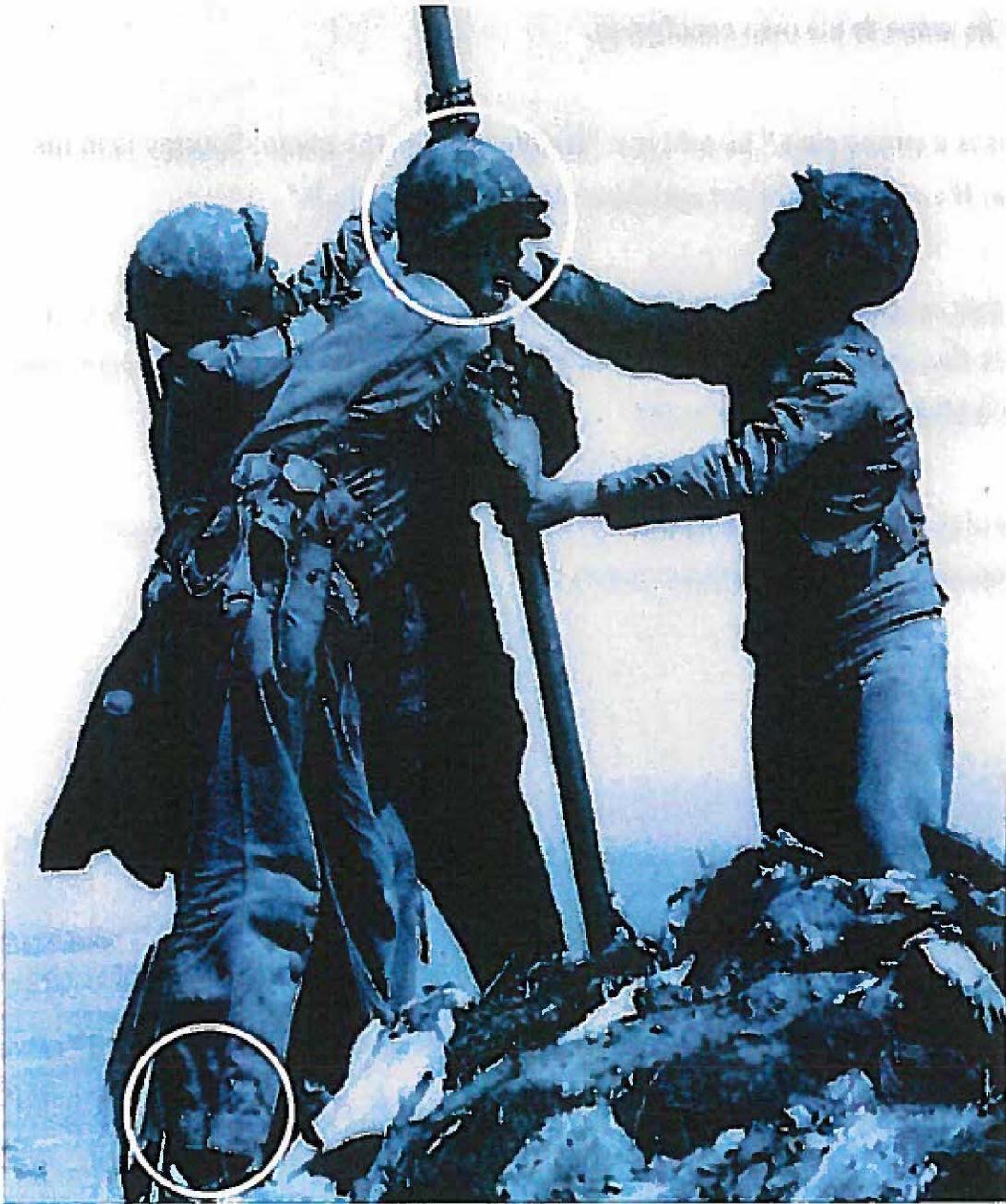
"This is a strong case," he told me. "Bradley isn't in the photo. Sousley is in his place. It's so strong I'm not sure how anyone could deny it."

But that conclusion immediately creates another mystery: If John Bradley isn't in the iconic flag-raising photo, and Franklin Sousley is standing in Bradley's spot, then who is standing in Sousley's spot?

Who is the mystery man who has never gotten credit for being in the most reproduced photo in American history?

#### **Clue No. 4: Sousley's helmet, belt and uncuffed pants**

On the left is a zoomed-in version of Franklin Sousley (center) from another flag raising photo taken that day. Note his uncuffed trousers, the soft cap beneath his helmet and his cartridge belt, which contains an empty canteen carrier and a wirecutter pouch. These details match the figure said to be Bradley in the famous flag raising photo (second from right).





Compare Sousley's profile to the figure second from right in the famous Rosenthal photo.  
(Photos: AP)



In this photo Sousley is at left, holding his rifle. The soft cap beneath his helmet is visible.  
Bradley is third from left holding his helmet in the air.

By day, Eric Krelle is a toy designer at Oriental Trading Co. The Omahan spends a lot of time designing variations of rubber ducks. A two-headed rubber duck. An Elvis rubber duck. An Obama duck.

But the rubber duck designer spends nights and weekends running [5thmarinedivision.com](http://5thmarinedivision.com) (<http://5thmarinedivision.com>), a website devoted to everything you would want to know about the division famed for fighting tenaciously on Iwo Jima and then again during the Vietnam War. He spends a large chunk of free time talking to Marine Corps veterans, their family members and fellow World War II junkies.

And last year, he assigned himself a new, part-time gig: He would pick up the Irishman's research and work to identify the Mystery Man in the Iwo Jima photo.

The Irishman had healed, he was returning to work and, frankly, he didn't think there was any possible way to identify Mystery Man.

But Eric Krelle had one advantage the Irishman didn't: He had a large collection of World War II-era Marine Corps memorabilia.

This collection became crucial when the Omahan started to watch the film footage of the famed flag raising, frame by frame, over and over and over.

After several dozen viewings, he noticed something: Just after the flag is raised, the Mystery Man moves away from the flag, crouches down and then walks back toward the flag. When he does this, the left side of his head becomes briefly visible. And that's when you can see, quite clearly, something hanging off the left side of Mystery Man's helmet.



The Americans raised a flag on Mount Suribachi the morning of Feb. 23, 1945, before a serious firefight with Japanese soldiers hiding in nearby caves. Several hours later, the first flag was replaced. Here is the moment when the first flag came down and the second went up. Joe Rosenthal's famous image captured the second flag-raising. (Photo: OFFICIAL U.S. MARINE CORPS PHOTO 112718)

Eric began wondering. Is that a vine? A piece of ripped cloth? His chin strap? He went back to the dozens of photographs of the day, clicking through them, over and over, after his wife and children had gone to sleep.

It looked like a strap, Eric thought, because when he zoomed in, he could see the faint outline of a buckle.

But it couldn't be a chin strap, he thought, as he stared at his living room computer. Many photos picture Marines with their chin straps undone, and those chin straps are thicker, wider and farther back on the helmet than whatever is hanging off Mystery Man's helmet.

And then, after spending many late nights blearily staring at zoomed-in photos of that day on Iwo Jima, Eric stumbled across what he believes is the answer.

In the background of a photo taken atop Mount Suribachi, he found a Marine with something hanging off the left side of his helmet. He checked the photos of every other Marine. No one else had this thing hanging off the left side of his helmet.

Eric got excited. He went back through the dozens of photos he had already examined countless times.

He found another image of the same man, who is identified in some photos and is further identifiable by his large nose. The Mystery Man still had something hanging off the left side of his helmet.

Eric got really excited. He found a third photo, a fourth. Each time this Marine was pictured on Mount Suribachi, he had something hanging off the left side of his helmet. Something skinny. Something that appeared to have a buckle attached to it.

But what?

Eric dug a World War II-era, standard-issue Marine helmet out of his memorabilia collection. He studied it and realized: There's a second strap on this helmet. A skinny leather strap on the front of the helmet that attaches the inner lining to its steel cover.

He went back to the computer. He clicked on a captioned photo of the man with the signature strap hanging from the left side of his helmet.

His name is Harold H. Schultz, he's a private first class hailing from Detroit, and until this moment, no one had ever publicly theorized or even suggested that he helped raise the famous flag on Iwo Jima.

But it's right there, Eric thought, as recognizable as a birthmark. Krelle is confident: Pfc. Harold Henry Schultz is the Mystery Man.

"Why has no one else ever noticed this?" he thought.

Eric took all his and the Irishman's months of research, boiled them down to a single blog post (<http://www.5thmarinedivision.com/flag-raiser-mystery.html>) with plenty of supporting photos and posted all the material on his website.

He waited for his website to light up, for historians and experts and maybe even Marine Corps leaders to respond.

Instead: Radio silence.

That's when he called me.

"I guess I just want people to see this," he told me. "So they can make up their own minds."

### **Clue No. 5: The strap**

After the mystery flag raiser helps raise the flag, film footage shot of the man shows him walking away from the flag and then back toward it. Omaha amateur historian Eric Krelle used these images and many others to identify Pfc. Harold H. Schultz as the Marine he believes helped raise the flag but never got credit for it. The key: The thin leather strap hanging off the left side of Schultz's helmet and visible in more than a dozen photos and still frames taken that day.





## Marines Assault Iwo Jima - Flag Raising - February 1945 (n...



The flag raising begins at the 2:22 mark of the video.

An interesting thing happened when I started calling World War II authors and Iwo Jima experts and asking them to look at evidence compiled by an Irishman with a hernia and an Omaha rubber duck designer.

These experts generally reacted as if Eric Krelle and Stephen Foley were arguing that the American flag the Marines raised on Iwo Jima was purple, green and Chiquita Banana yellow.

Several of them flatly refused to even look at Eric's blog post. One, a pre-eminent military historian, told me he would rather go fishing. Other experts grudgingly agreed to look, but only after telling me the many different ways that this was silly.

"These people are clearly insane," said one historian.

An hour later, the historian emailed me back. He had looked at the evidence, and he had two things to say.

One: I think I buy it. Two: Don't quote me on that.

I spoke to numerous experts — including experts connected to the Marine Corps — who privately found the research eye-opening but wouldn't say so publicly.

One expert, who has spent years writing and making a documentary about the first flag raising on Iwo Jima, did agree to talk.

Filmmaker Dustin Spence viewed the research by the two amateurs and said it doesn't convince him. There are many similarities between other known photos of John Bradley taken that day and the figure thought to be Bradley in the famous photo, he says, including the placement of two pouches hanging from his belt.

And the evidence that Foley and Eric Krelle raise — evidence such as cuffed vs. uncuffed pants and helmet liner vs. no helmet liner — isn't enough, Spence said, to override 70 years of established Marine Corps history.

"Remember that the first flag was raised at 10:20 a.m. and the second flag raising didn't take place until approximately 12:30 p.m.," he wrote me, pointing out that Bradley could have uncuffed or cuffed his pants during that two-hour period. "A lot of time goes by. A lot of little things can change."

Two Creighton University historians also agreed to view the research and then react to it, which is why, one day earlier this year, Eric stands at the front of a Creighton classroom, presenting his case.

He shows blown-up photo after blown-up photo. He walks the professors through why he thinks John Bradley isn't in the photo and why he thinks Harold Schultz is.

Heather Fryer, an expert in 20th century American history and co-director of Creighton's American Studies program, has already gone through the research once with Eric.

She started off that meeting leaning to the side, a skeptical look on her face. Then she leaned forward to get a better look at John Bradley's cuffed pants and his belt.

By the time Eric showed her the strap hanging from the Mystery Man's helmet — the strap that appears to correspond to the one hanging off Harold Schultz's helmet in photos — her eyes were wide and her mind almost visibly churned.

You need corroborating evidence, she told him. Maybe some clues hidden in John Bradley's wartime letters or other correspondence.

"But this is very compelling," Fryer said. "At the very least, it's a question that needs to continue to be asked."

William Sherrard is even more skeptical. The Creighton military historian watches as Eric presents his argument using blown-up photos projected onto a screen. Here are the uncuffed pants. Here is the belt. Here is the dangling strap.

He asks questions: Have you eliminated all the other Marines who may have tiny straps hanging off their helmets?

And if Harold Schultz is actually in one of the most famous photos of all time, wouldn't someone have noticed in the last seven decades? Wouldn't Schultz have told someone?

"It's compelling, but I wouldn't call it proof," Sherrard says of Eric's research after the presentation ends. "You can make photos say what you want them to say."

Just before he leaves the classroom, Sherrard turns to me.

"Let me know if you find the family of Harold Schultz," he said. "That would be fascinating."



While one Marine keeps watch, his comrades work to wedge the U.S. flag into the rocky ground atop Mount Suribachi. This is the first flag-raising, in the morning. On the far left, a portion of Harold Schultz's head can be seen, with the liner strap dangling off his helmet. (Photo: AP)



Schultz is alone at the right.



Joe Rosenthal's famous "Gung Ho" photo. Sausley is fourth from the left. Bradley is sixth from the left. Schultz is fifth from the right.

The package lands on my desk one Tuesday, overnighted from Los Angeles.

Inside the package is a single manila envelope sent to me by a woman named Dezreen MacDowell. Inside the thin envelope is the sum total of everything Dezreen knows about the time her stepfather, Harold Schultz, spent fighting on Iwo Jima.

My search for Schultz has been long, frustrated by false leads and dead ends. I contact a man in Indiana, and a woman in Pennsylvania, and several middle-aged men in Michigan. Yes, their departed father was named Harold H. Schultz, they say. No, he was not a Marine in World War II.

When I finally track the real Schultz by following his Purple Heart, which had been sold by a distant relative to a California pawnshop, it becomes clear why he was so hard to find.

Our Mystery Man lived a mysterious life.

Wounded on Iwo Jima just weeks after the famous flag-raising photo was taken, Schultz came back to the United States, got an honorable discharge from the Marine Corps and moved to sunny L.A.

He worked for the U.S. Postal Service for his entire career. After a teenage fiancée died — likely while Schultz was fighting in the Pacific — he spent most of his adult life single and never fathered any children.

He finally married in his 60s, to Rita Reyes Schultz. She had several children, including Dezreen, from a previous marriage.

Harold was kind, quiet and all-but-silent on the subject of his World War II experience.

Dezreen tried to ask him questions. Harold told her he lied about his age to join the Marines early. He told her about coming home. He never breathed a word about Iwo Jima or Suribachi or a famous photo.

He died in 1995, with few friends and no close relatives, as far as Dezreen knows. Harold Schultz didn't get so much as a one-paragraph obituary, though he did score a famous final resting place: Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where ordinary folks are buried next to film stars like Rudolph Valentino and punk rock guitarist Johnny Ramone.

After her mother died last year, Dezreen helped to clean out her house. It was then that she found a manila envelope containing the things Harold Schultz chose to save from his long-ago war.

I open the envelope. Here are Schultz's discharge papers. Here is a program from the Marine Corps' 40th anniversary reunion for Iwo Jima veterans, a celebration it looks like Harold Schultz attended.

Here is a copy of the group photo taken atop Mount Suribachi. It's known as the "Gung Ho" photo and is famous in its own right. The photo is autographed at the bottom by the man who took it: Joe Rosenthal.

On the back of the photo, in shaky blue ink, Schultz has written the names of the 18 men in the "Gung Ho" photo, from left to right.

PFC Ira Hayes, he writes. First Lieutenant Harold Schrier, third from left. Then Sousley. Strank. Bradley. Fifth from the right, he writes his own name, tracing over the 'z' twice to make it more visible: "PFC Harold H Schultz."

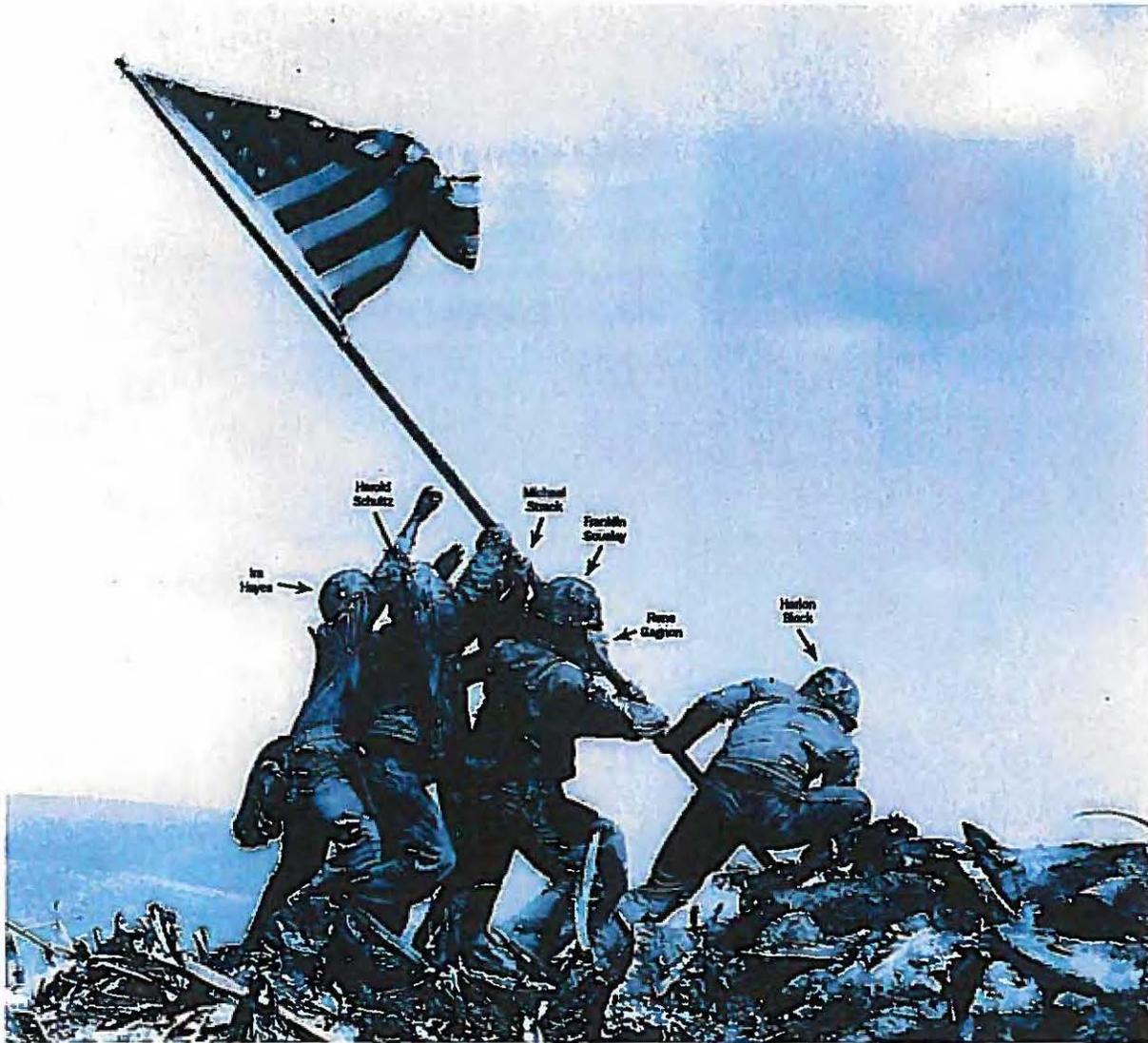
There is one more item in this envelope. It is right on top of the other pieces of memorabilia, in fact, the first thing I see.

I set it aside, and then when I have looked at the rest of the envelope's contents, I pick it up and stare at this photo for a long time, wondering if the fact that Harold Schultz kept a copy of the famous flag-raising photo until the day he died means anything — or nothing at all.

I slowly turn it over, hoping he has written the names in shaky blue ink, hoping he will lead us closer to answering a seven decade-old question, hoping he will tell us something, anything, about the most reproduced photo of all time.

There is no blue ink. There is nothing at all.

The back of the photo is blank. Harold Schultz isn't solving the lingering mystery of the Iwo Jima flag raising. If we want to do that, we'll have to do it ourselves.



**THE ESTABLISHED FLAG RAISERS**



**Ira Hayes**



**Franklin Sousley**



**Michael Strank**



**John Bradley**



**Rene Gagnon**



**Harlon Block**

**WHAT NEW EVIDENCE SUGGESTS**



**Ira Hayes**



**Harold Schultz**



**Michael Strank**



**Franklin Sousley**



**Rene Gagnon**



**Harlon Block**



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