

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS __7/10

Understated Eastwood (anti)war movie

Directed by Clint Eastwood
Screenplay by William Broyles Jr. and Paul Haggis

Ryan Phillippe	John "Doc" Bradley
Jesse Bradford	Rene Gagnon
Adam Beach	Ira Hayes
John Benjamin Hickey	Keyes Beech
John Slattery	Bud Gerber
Barry Pepper	Mike Strank
Jamie Bell	Ralph "Iggy" Ignatowski
Paul Walker	Hank Hansen
Robert Patrick	Colonel Chandler Johnson

Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* is a touching rendition of the lives of three men who raised the flag that became "the single [camera] shot that can end the war" in the early days of the Battle of Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945.



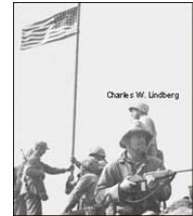
Raising the 2nd flag atop Mt. Suribachi
Feb. 23, 1945

Three of the six men who raised that flag, then survived the battle, were extracted from the campaign to become spokesmen for the government's successful War Bonds' appeals. They were paraded around the country as bona fide war heroes, to their embarrassment (and in the case of American Indian Ira Hayes, into a downward spiral of alcoholic self-destruction).

This is fabulous cinema, whether you like the war authenticity—the movie is coproduced by Eastwood and Steven Spielberg (*Saving Private Ryan*)—or the reminiscent romantic touches of *Bridges of Madison County*. Depicting such reality of battle has the effect of a hundred antiwar marches. And Eastwood, whose companion movie is *Letters from Iwo Jima*, has indicated in interviews he regards the movies as gritty testaments to the evil of war.

The flag-raising photo became an instant classic, winning a Pulitzer, and becoming the most reproduced photograph in history. Less known is that the celebrated photo was actually a second, replacement-flag raising on the same day in the same spot. The first flag raising was the direct result of Marines having taken the fortified Mt. Suribachi, and neutralized the heavy guns that had inflicted so many US casualties during the landing.

The plot basically focuses on the three men of the second flag-raising that captured the American imagination. In current time, the son of "war hero" John "Doc" Bradley (Ryan Phillippe) has come to the hospital after Doc has had a heart attack. He is trying to connect the dots of what happened back then, also interviewing others who went through the times with his father.



Raising the 1st flag under enemy fire

The son, James Bradley, is the author of the book on which the movie is based. His inquiries provide the impetus for the stories of the men, their remembrances of carnage, fame, and then being discarded by the war machine... like so many veterans.

Ryan Phillippe, as Doc, plays the quiet, steady spirit of the era—the quintessential average GI who does his citizen's duty irrespective of the political machinations of the Oligarchy. He's very good in the role, but Adam Beach gives the performance of a career as Ira Hayes, giving director Eastwood an efficient tool for demonstrating the depressing political absurdities, and racism, of the times.

If you have a father who fought in WWII, as I do—Captain Truman Wright, USAF, RIP—you will probably be moved to tears by some scenes. Particularly, the thematic climax, accompanied by Eastwood's slow, quiet, haunting score of piano and bugle, where Doc on his deathbed disclaims any heroism. Nobody talks about the war because it's too damned horrifying to remember.

"We just tried to keep ourselves alive, help keep our buddies alive, and come home. That's it." A poignant epitaph for the most humane, if not heroic, of the Greatest Generation.