

Flags of our fathers essay



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Flags of Our Fathers is a biography of John "Doc" Bradley, also called Jack, and the five other flag raisers in battle on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. It is written by his son, James Bradley, who knew very little about his father's experience and heroism in the battle of Iwo Jima. This novel takes the reader into the lives of these six men and provides a glimpse of the United States as it was before, during and after what is perceived as the worst battle of World War II.

The men in this biography were considered heroes for their actions; however none of them thought this to be completely true. When asked about being such a hero John as well as the other flag raisers agreed that "The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back," (pg. 343). This biography is a wonderful representation of the humility and greatness that the soldiers showed during the time of war. The author portrays his message to the reader through his use of a personal recollection of the battle, and the events in the lives of each of the six men who came to be known as the flag raisers.

At the beginning of the book, the writing is like that of any other novel, slow in some places but interesting due to the personal twist that James Bradley incorporates throughout the pages. After much research and prying onto the lives of the six men, he tells each of their stories as to how they came to enlist and go to war for their country. With each man, a different story leading up to his decision to enlist in the United States Marines (with the exception of Doc who was a Navy Corpsman) is told through the perspective of a man who was almost unaffected by Iwo Jima, due to the fact he knew very little about the battle that went on in that small island of Japan. The

author is able to give the reader very detailed images of the lives of the six men before their decision to enlist in the Military due to his research of the lives of these men. Taking a personal interest in each personal story helps Bradley develop the style of writing that he wants to portray to his readers.

When telling the story of each man as just a young boy wanting to join the military and fight for the freedom of his country, Bradley uses his language in order to paint a picture of an ordinary young boy in the United States, connecting the reader on a more personal level, as well as a factual one. He tells of the attitude and personality traits of each of the young men before they go off to war, and of their excitement to fight for their country even at ages as young as fifteen. Bradley's intention of writing this novel does not seem to be just the personal story of these six men, but rather how the diversity of the six men make up the American experience for each of the individuals in what may be the single most important and captivating picture ever taken in American history. The novel focuses on how different each of the flag raisers' lives were before their decision as well as how different their journeys were leading up to the time when they all come together to work as one, fighting for a common virtue.

" Uncommon Valor Was A Common Virtue," (pg. 327) inscribed on the monumental statue of the six men, explains that even though the men have very different lifestyles and personalities, the uncommon valor of Iwo Jima brought them together more than what can be seen by those who were not there at the time of this blood ridden battlefield. Bradley uses very explicit detail when explaining the battles and the deaths and injuries that came from the island, in hopes of getting the readers to grasp the intensity of what

actually happened on the island, rather than knowing it as just a famous battle. Throughout the novel, Bradley emphasizes the roles of each of the men's mothers. He does this by telling the mothers' opinions on each of the boys' decisions as well as giving insight to the letters that many wrote home to their mothers. In the last letter from an Iwo Jima-bound Marine he wrote "Don't worry about me Momma.

I'll be OK." (pg. 123). The reader is able to sympathize with the men who are dying when Bradley explains that the Japanese were thought to die with the Emperor's name on their lips, but in actuality any dying soldier, whether Japanese, American, or any other nationality, dies with his last thoughts or words usually about his mother. He emphasizes this point by telling about the death of a young man named Crull, who with his last breaths screamed out "Mom! Mom! He's killing me! Mom, he's killing me!" (pg. 192).

For the soldier Thomas Mayers, who witnessed this tragedy, the memory haunted him long after the battle was over. On the other hand, the soldiers who made it through the conquering of Mount Suribachi wrote letter home to their mothers reassuring them of their health and safety, and not going into detail or telling them much about the actuality of what really happened. In a letter to his mother and father, Jack Bradley wrote very calmly and almost had a sense of humor about the situation. "I just have time for a line or two, I want to tell you I am in the best of health..... I'd give my left arm for a good shower and a clean shave, I have a six day beard.

Haven't had any soap or water since I hit the beach. I never knew I could go without food, water, or sleep for three days but I know now, it can be done."

(pg. 216). Franklin, one of the six flag raisers sent a copy of a picture of him in his uniform home to his mother with a very meaningful message to her on the back: " To the kindest friend I ever knew, The one I told all my troubles to. You can look the world over, but you won't find another Like you, my dear Mother.

(pg. 271). Early on in the story Bradley showed the importance of the mothers as Mike Strank was quoted saying " I want to bring as many of you back home to your mothers as possible. " (pg. 104).

This had a major impact in the lives of the soldiers that were under his rank due to the high respect they had for him. They all idolized Mike for his natural leadership and protective and understanding ways. He was known as a " Marine's Marine," and earned much of his respect by emphasizing the safety and well-being of the young soldiers under his wing. He would tell the boys in his squad " Follow me, and I'll try to bring all of you back safely to your mothers..." which appealed heavily to the young soldiers (pg.

48). Another focus of Bradley's throughout the novel is that of companionship, friendship, and brotherhood. He emphasizes how close the soldiers were to one another and the trust that plays a huge role in being a part of the United States Marines when fighting for a common virtue. The bond and love between the men in Iwo Jima was unimaginable, and compelled the soldiers to have courage.

One soldier, Danny Thomas was quoted " There was an incredible bond among the guys on that beach, we knew each other and we could rely upon each other, trust one another. We had trained together and we were bonded.

” (pg. 161). Jacklyn Lucas fooled the recruiters with his muscled physique at the age of fourteen and was permitted to serve in the Marines.

He stowed himself on a ship headed for Iwo Jima and arrived on the island without a rifle, picked one up from a casualty and began to fight. During a close fight with eight Japanese soldiers, two grenades were tossed close to Lucas and his comrades. He thrusted one grenade into the soft ash, but as the other landed close by, he warned the others to move, and jumped on top of the grenades. When asked fifty-three years after his survival why he jumped on the grenades, his answer came easily with no hesitation, “ To save my buddies. ” (pg.

175). The immense reality of what happened that day was that this young man put his life on the line, in an almost ensured death, to save his friends. Readers are most likely not able to grasp the full concept of what trust and friendship meant to the men on the island of Iwo Jima. Corpsman Robert Degeus said “ It wasn’t a matter of living or dying or fighting. It was a matter of helping your friends.

” This attitude of friendship and trust in one another got the Marines far in the battle at Iwo Jima. Without the trust and being able to rely on one another, each soldier would have been fighting for his own life, and not focused on the common goal of protecting their country. Outside the cemetery on the island someone had chiseled, “ When you go home Tell them for us and say For your tomorrow We gave our today. ” (pg.

247). Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey was quoted " There are no great men. Just great challenges which ordinary men, out of necessity, are forced by circumstances to meet.

" (pg. 341). His quote brings the entire novel together in such a way to almost explain the whole biography. It explains that the six flag raisers were ordinary men, not heroes as it was thought by the majority of those following the war. They were no one special, but they were forced by the war to meet and fight alongside of one another, and were responsible for raising a replacement flag on top of Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima. The six men were not responsible for the raising of the original flag, but the American public was led to believe that they were because the picture that was taken was that of the replacement flag going up, not the actual one.

Ira Hayes noted after he returned home and saw the fame that was coming from " The Photograph," " It's funny what a picture can do. " (pg. 281). Before his death, John (Jack) " Doc" Bradley spoke for all the flag raisers when trying to convey a message that he was sure the other men would agree with, " People refer to us as heroes.

We certainly weren't heroes. And I speak for the rest of the guys as well. " The six men did not consider themselves heroes. They knew that they did just what anyone else in their situation would have done, and therefore were not heroes. They were simply Marines, fighting for the freedom of their country, their families, and the future of their home.

" They were boys of common virtue. Called to duty.