On February 19, 1945, over 100,000 Marines landed on a tiny island in the South Pacific named Iwo Jima. Their objective: Two airfields critical for the invasion of the Empire of Japan. Twenty-one thousand Japanese defenders burrowed into the volcanic rock anxiously awaiting the Americans. It was the first attack on a Japanese home island.

The Japanese positions on the island were heavily fortified, with vast bunkers, hidden artillery, and 11 miles of underground tunnels. The battle raged for 36 days and produced some of the fiercest fighting of World War II. In fact, Iwo Jima was the only battle in which American casualties exceeded the Japanese.

On the 5th day, February 23rd, the battle was immortalized by Joe Rosenthal’s photograph of the second raising of the
American flag on top of the 545 foot Mt. Suribachi (sir-ee-botch-ee). Of the six men who raised the American flag that day, three (Mike Strank, Franklin Sousley and Harlon Block) would later be killed on Iwo Jima. The surviving three flag raisers (Rene Gagnon, Ira Hayes and John Bradley) returned home for the last bond tour of the war, which raised $24 billion dollars for the US treasury.

During the 36-day battle, 27 US military personnel received the Medal of Honor, our nations highest military decoration which is bestowed on a member of the United States armed forces who distinguishes himself "...conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States...” Thirteen of them were awarded posthumously.

The importance of the battle of Iwo Jima to Marines is impossible to measure. The importance of the photograph of the
raising of the flag on top of Mt. Suribachi to Americans past, present and future accurately represents the achievements of the "The Greatest Generation" and still captures the soul of a nation.