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Photo by Lou Lowery, USMC Archives & Special Collections

Why replace the Stars and Stripes which Schrier and his men had raised without incident? What commander would put another group of Marines in the middle of a "bulls'-eye," just to hoist a flag which was already there?

It was Chandler Johnson's idea. He knew how important it was to safeguard the first American flag raised on Japanese soil.

The Colonel wanted the battalion - which had risked everything to secure Suribachi - to have the flag. And, it is said, he wanted to prevent James Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy who was watching the battle progress, from carrying out his expressed intent to keep the flag as a souvenir. Johnson dispatched Lt. Ted Tuttle to find another, bigger flag.

Meanwhile, Lt. Schrier (second from the bottom in this picture) and his men, at the top of the mountain, had fought off a firestorm from Japanese defenders. All had been quiet until the flag was raised, then Kuribayashi's troops took aim at the Marines. None of the Americans realized, until later, they had been outnumbered four to one. As Chick Robeson recalled:

Why these Japanese hadn't tried to bolt from the cave and overwhelm the flagraising patrol is a mystery. They had our men outnumbered four to one. What made the situation even more unaccountable was that there were other occupied caves on the summit. We'll never know the number of Japanese who could have hurled themselves against our patrol. But there were surely enough to have killed every man in it. (James Bradley, *Flags of our Fathers*, page 207 of the October 2, 2001 paperback edition.)

Chuck Lindberg (at the head of the column) and his fellow flamethrowers burned out some of the caves. Other members of the assault patrol used demolition charges to secure the mountain. Days later, Lindberg (who was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry on Iwo) and Robeson discovered something else - the bodies of at least 150 dead Japanese soldiers who had committed suicide in a cave.

As time passed at the top of Suribachi, the battery which powered Lt. Schrier's field telephone was growing weaker. Chandler Johnson decided his exec needed a wired connection. Once again calling on Dave Severance for assistance, Johnson ordered a detail to help.

Severance told Sgt. Mike Strank (a veteran of the battle for Bougainville), Harlon Block (a parachutist who also survived Bougainville), Ira Hayes (a Marine paratrooper, Bougainville veteran and Pima from Arizona) and Franklin Sousley (from Hilltop, Kentucky) to go up the mountain, unreeling the phone wire as they went. They would be accompanied by Rene Gagnon, Severance's runner, who would deliver more batteries for Schrier's phone.

Before making their ascent, the boys met at Johnson's field headquarters. Lt. Tuttle had retrieved a bigger (96" x 56") flag from *LST 779*. Johnson gave the flag to Rene, to carry up the mountain. Then he gave Sgt. Strank an order for Lt. Schrier: "Put this flag up, and I want him to save the small flag for me." (*Flags of our Fathers*, page 209)

The replacement flag, it turns out, had been rescued from a Pearl Harbor salvage yard. It had survived Japan's surprise attack on December 7, 1941.

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Media Stream



James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy

Image online, courtesy the [Truman Library](#) website.

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Sgt. Mike Strank

Image online, courtesy the 5thmarinedivision.com website.

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Sgt. Mike Strank - Veteran of Bougainville

Image online, courtesy the arlingtoncemetery.net website.

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Franklin Sousley, Marine from Hilltop, Kentucky

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Harlon Block, Parachutist who Survived Bougainville

Image online, courtesy the nativevillage.org website.

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Ira Hayes, Marine Paratrooper

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Rene Gagnon - To the Top of Mount Suribachi

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Trailer - Flags of Our Fathers

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