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Aerial view of Iwo Jima at about the time of the battle. It was here that thousands of people died between February-March, 1945. Department of Defense photo.

It was the night before Iwo Jima's likely capture when General Kuribayashi, a member of a Samurai family, sent a message to his countrymen on Radio Tokyo. He would die on the island, he said, defending the front line of Japan's mainland. He had already written a letter to his son, quoted in *Flags of Our Fathers* (page 148):

*The life of your father is just like a lamp before the wind.*

The lives of most other Japanese defenders, on Iwo Jima, were also snuffed-out. Of the estimated 22,000 imperial troops, only 1,083 were captured. The rest likely followed Kuribayashi's "Courageous Battle Vow," which he required to be kept in plain view:

*We are here to defend this island to the limit of our strength. We must devote ourselves to that task entirely. Each of your shots must kill many Americans. We cannot allow ourselves to be captured by the enemy. If our positions are overrun, we will take bombs and grenades and throw ourselves under the tanks to destroy them. We will infiltrate the enemy's lines to exterminate him. No man must die until he has killed at least ten Americans. We will harass the enemy with guerrilla actions until the last of us has perished. Long live the Emperor!*

What of the surviving flag raisers? How did they spend the rest of their lives, after the war was over?

- Ira Hayes had a very difficult time dealing with everyday life. Twelve days before his death (on January 24, 1955), he had celebrated his thirty-second birthday. He did not marry, or have children. He lived nearly a decade after Iwo Jima's D-Day.
- Rene Gagnon carried the replacement flag up Mt. Suribachi. He was born in Manchester, New Hampshire on March 7, 1925 - and died there on October 12, 1979. He is buried in Arlington, not far from the Marines Corp Memorial. Rene (pictured here later in life) married and had one son.
- John Bradley won the Navy Cross for extraordinary valor as a corpsman at Iwo Jima. Born in Antigo, Wisconsin (on July 10, 1923), he died there on the 11th of January, 1994. He was 70 years old, happily married with eight children. When he died, an editorial in his local newspaper, *The Antigo Daily Journal*, said: "John Bradley will be forever memorialized for a few moments action at the top of a remote Pacific mountain. We prefer to remember him for his life. If the famous flag-raising at Iwo Jima symbolized American patriotism and valor, Bradley's quiet, modest nature and philanthropic efforts shine as an example of the best of small town American values."

So many lives, and so many deaths, touched so many people. Where does a person find the courage to fling himself on a grenade to keep his buddies alive? What makes a young man, not yet 21, able to think not of himself but of the lives of the injured all around him? Perhaps "uncommon valor" could actually become a "common virtue" for everyone, if we could just learn to put others first.

At the end of a military person's life, a song which has its origins in the American Civil War is often played. It is with that song - called *Taps* - that we pay tribute to all those who fell at Iwo Jima:

*Day is done,  
gone the sun,  
from the lake,  
from the hills,  
from the sky.  
All is well,  
safely rest,  
God is nigh...*

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-REST-OF-THEIR-LIVES-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-REST-OF-THEIR-LIVES-Flags-Of-Our-Fathers>

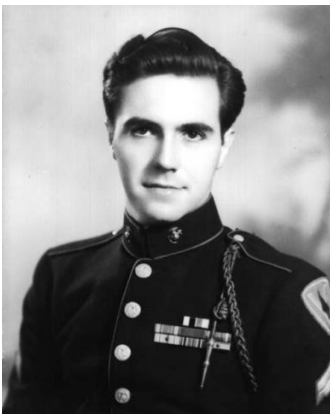
## Media Stream



### Ira Hayes

Image online, courtesy the [iwojima.com](http://www.iwojima.com) website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ira-Hayes->



### Rene Gagnon, Carried Replacement Flag Up Mt. Suribachi

Image online, courtesy [iwojima.com](http://www.iwojima.com) website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Rene-Gagnon-Carried-Replacement-Flag-Up-Mt.-Suribachi>



### Rene Gagnon is Buried in Arlington

Image online, courtesy the [arlingtoncemetery.net](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net) website.

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### Rene Gagnon, Later in Life

Image online, courtesy the [iwojima.com](http://www.iwojima.com) website.

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### John Bradley Won Navy Cross for Iwo Jima

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### John Bradley, Later in Life

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